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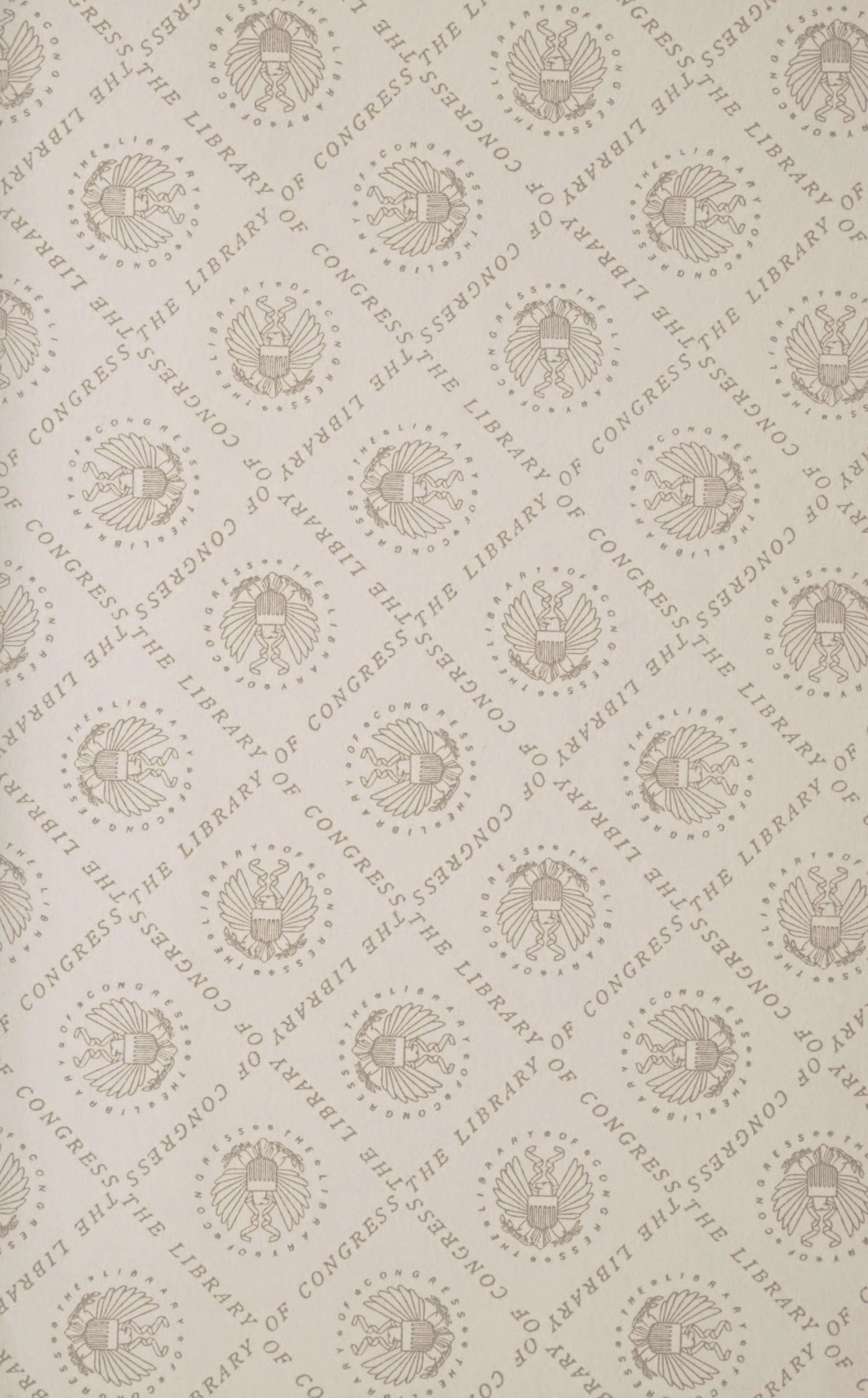
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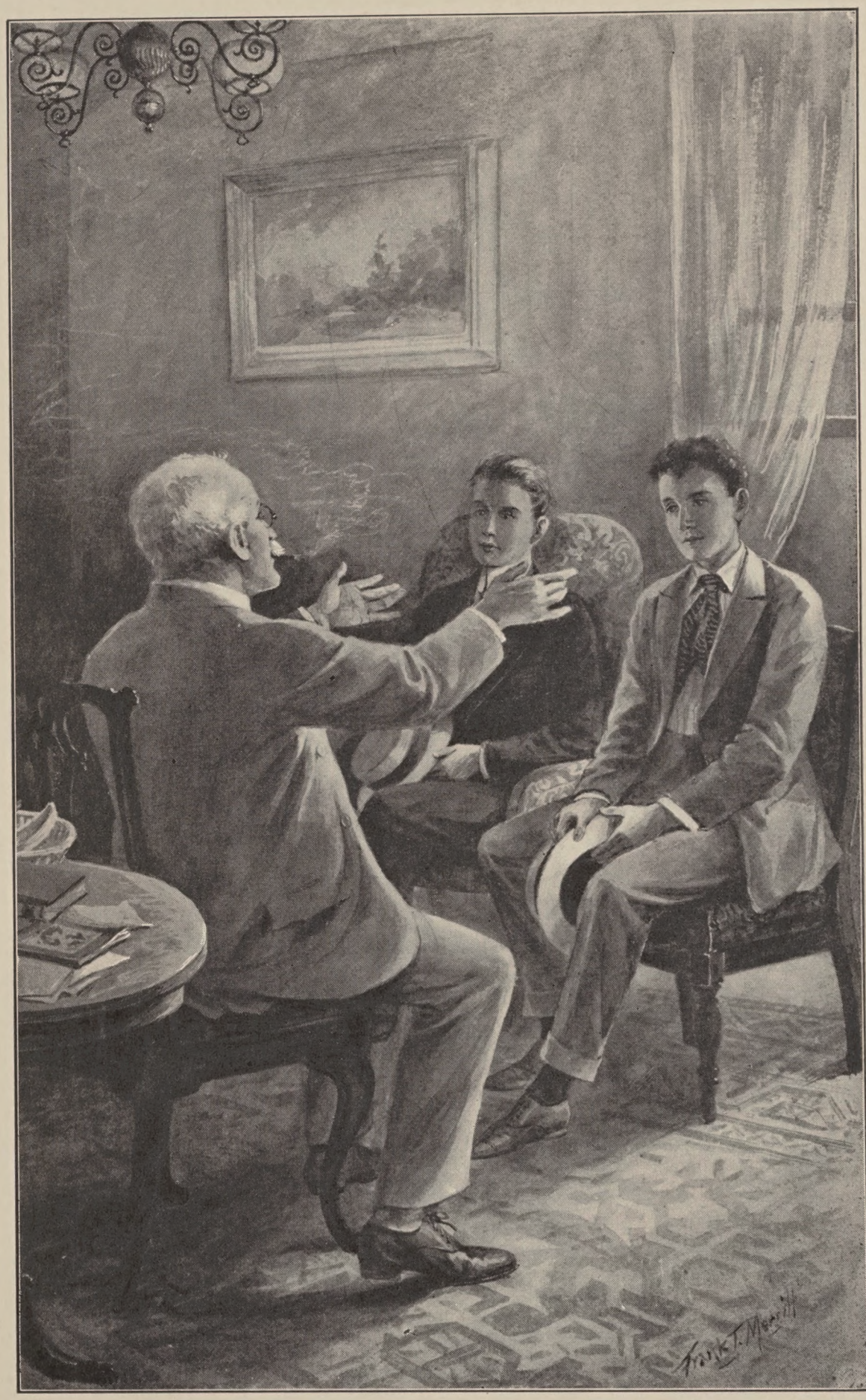

"'THE SENATOR WENT ON, NOW AND THEN EXTENDING HIS ARMS APPEALINGLY'" *(See page 105)*

The MERRYMAKERS IN CHICAGO

AND THEIR ADVENTURES IN THAT GREAT CITY

By HERSCHEL WILLIAMS

Author of "The Merrymakers in New York"

Illustrated by FRANK T. MERRILL

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AUG 16 1920

Dedicated

to

HIS COUSIN

Adèle Place

BY THE AUTHOR

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THE MERRYMAKERS IN CHICAGO

CHAPTER I

CONCERNING CHICAGO

"CHICAGO is a wonder! It's a great, throbbing dynamo with a merry-go-round attachment!"

These and other extravagant remarks Carl Merrymaker kept hurling over the telephone at his older brother Ned, who was perspiring in a stuffy booth at the Coliseum where he had just begun to report a Republican Convention for a New York newspaper. On this occasion Carl had a great deal to say, for the reason that he had not talked to Ned since January, and it was now past the middle of a very warm June. Indeed, the boy was in such ecstasy that he called Chicago a "pippin" and many other misleading names intended to be complimentary.

"For mercy sake, Carl, let me have a chance to speak a word — I can't wait another minute,"

interrupted Marjorie, his younger sister. She almost forced the receiver from his hands and lifted a rosy smiling face to the transmitter. "Hello, Ned dear — this is Marje —"

But what Marje said would have tried the speed and the patience of the ablest court stenographer. She talked so rapidly and ran her words together to such an extent, Ned could get little from her conversation aside from the assurance that it was brimming over with the most sisterly intentions. Then Jean and Rex had to talk, after which followed a chorus of bright sayings and hilarious peals of laughter, such as four youngsters are sure to create when they all insist upon talking by telephone at the same time. Small wonder it was that Aunt Esther Fortune had to take another headache tablet, and stretch herself wearily upon the chaise-longue in the drawing-room; or that she sighed and moaned! She was not accustomed to children, and she hated noise.

After this long and spirited conversation by wire, the four Merrymakers hurried back to their bedrooms; they wanted to unpack their valises and to make sure that they themselves were in the pink of condition. For Brother Ned was coming out on the next Indiana Avenue car; and Brother Ned

was very fastidious when it came to passing upon the appearances of his younger brothers and sisters, especially when they were away visiting.

All were waiting eagerly in the reception hall when Ned reached their Aunt Esther's apartment. They could tell by the way he rang the bell that he was frantic to get inside and consume the entire quartet of them in one crushing embrace. When the maid opened the door, the air was rent with shrill cries of welcome; though it must be confessed that Aunt Esther Fortune — now sitting erect on the couch by the window — was not yet sufficiently trained to distinguish between sounds that were joyous and those positively disagreeable. Notwithstanding that she lived in the noisiest city in the world, she spent most of her time in its quietest corners. She appeared pale and ill at ease as she sat there in a street dress that looked black and uncomfortable for such a warm day. Furthermore, she was shuddering at these emotional greetings; they were so much opposed to anything included in her long widowhood of ten years — what with Carl frantically shaking Ned's hand as very excitable foreigners do; Marje with her arms about Ned's neck; Jean crumpled up in a hoydenish posture under his arm, as she wildly kissed his other

hand; and young Rex clinging sturdily to his big brother's legs — simply because he could find no more affectionate attitude to assume while waiting his turn to be greeted. Then — strange to say — Aunt Esther Fortune found herself laughing! It was probably the first time she had laughed out loud since her husband's demise.

"I'm sure *I* never received such a warm greeting in all my life," she said between chuckles. But no one paid any heed to her statement; they were all too busily occupied in renewing acquaintance after a long separation of nearly six months. There was so much to talk about — so many explanations to make. For one thing, Marje had to tell why her older sister, Bess, could not come along with them; and Carl had to take the sincerity from her apologies by explaining to Ned that the hot weather was not so much to blame as that young Dr. Lane, who had been keeping company with Bess till it was beginning to look as if they should have a wedding in the family before long. Then Jean had to make a plea for a tear or two, when in the same breath with her demonstrative greeting to her big brother, she announced that old Spot-light, the faithfullest cat that ever lived, had been run over by a wheelbarrow filled with bricks, and never had the satisfac-

tion of knowing what it was that had struck her. And Rex continued to whoop and halloo, and to beguile Ned into believing that he, the head of the Merrymaker family, was the greatest hero of modern times. Whatever it was they said, it proved to be very interesting conversation to all concerned — so engrossing indeed that Aunt Esther began to suspect she was no more than a black phantom standing in the way of their healthy young lives. She sighed again and passed an interval of jealousy by pulling down the blinds to keep the late afternoon sun from fading her oriental rug.

"I'm sorry I couldn't meet you at the station," Ned was trying to say above the din. He had come into the drawing-room and was sitting on the long couch, with Jean and Rex on his lap, and Carl and Marje on either side of him — a little too close for hot weather, but worlds apart should one consider how much they wanted to make of the few short days they were to be together. "I arrived in Chicago on the thirteenth," he continued. "Came on a fast express. I had a great deal of preliminary work to do before the Convention commenced. You know, I'm one of the night city-editors now; but the managing editor thought it would be a good thing for me to have a change, so he sent me to

cover the assignment. And Jack Gore came along with me."

"I'd like to see him! How is old Jack? Is he as funny as ever?" came from the others in the same breath. Evidently that queer name awakened happy recollections, for they all laughed again.

"Just as he was when you saw him in New York last Christmas," assured Ned. "You'll see him soon. This Convention is a terrible crush, and it's hotter than Jamaica ginger. It seems that all the big politicians in the world are stuffed into that Coliseum — and it's a regular Bedlam. Jack and I have to work like convicts; yet we've arranged it so that one or the other of us can be with you most of the time. But children, wasn't it splendid of Aunt Esther to pay your way to Chicago — so you could see me once more?"

Ned's closing remark had a magic effect upon the youngsters. As if in response to a command, they all began to repeat their thanks as they drew their aunt into the family circle and seated her on the couch close to Ned.

This act of courtesy had a pleasant effect upon Mrs. Fortune, also; for she smiled wanly and said in an embarrassed manner: "I've done nothing

to call forth your thanks, children. I've been a very selfish woman — all wrapped up in myself for so many years. But when my poor husband died —"

"Please don't speak of it again," pleaded Ned, not wishing at this happy moment to remind his orphaned brothers and sisters that there was such a thing as death.

"No — I'm not going to speak of that." Mrs. Fortune sat more erect, and forced a smile that to the Merrymakers was no more than a tiny flicker. Though she was pale and her dark hair faintly streaked with white, she was beautiful when she looked pleasant; and the girls thought her garments elegant and most becoming. Yet they could not understand why she should wear black, without a solitary ornament or a bit of color to relieve the sight of those who had been compelled to gaze upon her during the ten long years of her rather young widowhood. "I can hardly realize that you are Blanche's children," she went on plaintively. "I neglected Blanche, I suppose — but I didn't mean to. I surely felt very sad when I heard of her death. My husband and I were in Paris at the time — and I wasn't very strong."

"I never knew we had an Aunt Esther till you

telegraphed us the money," interrupted Rex with childish honesty.

"Of course not, dear. None of you younger children had ever seen me. In fact, Ned and Bessie were little tots when I visited your home the last time." Mrs. Fortune colored when she saw the rather reproachful look in Marje's brown eyes.

"I can't imagine two sisters being apart for so many years," dared Jean.

"Wait till you grow up," suggested Mrs. Fortune. "Life does such amazing things to families — it separates and changes them. Sometimes so many interests crowd in, they almost forget about one another. We always have to be making room for strangers and adapting ourselves to new conditions. I was so devoted to my husband, and we traveled a great deal —"

"But how did you happen to want us to visit you?" asked Carl. He was not accustomed to women who speak in sad voices — and about nothing in particular save their happier past. Fortunately, he was linked with those great souls who bear their sufferings and disappointments bravely for the sake of others, and make the best of whatever the present brings.

"It was this way," went on Mrs. Fortune, bright-

ening a little. "A few nights ago, your brother Ned called to see me. He had come to Chicago to report the great Convention. I could hardly believe my eyes when he told me who he was. There he stood — a polite and manly young fellow of twenty-three, and so much like his mother's people. Before I could realize it, he was calling me Aunt Esther and making himself at home. He was a godsend to me. I've lived alone so long — only a few friends and amusements, and none of them ever satisfied me. When he told me how you had visited him in New York during the Christmas holidays — and what a grand time you had together, I made up my mind I wouldn't take a trip to Mackinac this summer; but send you the money, to come to Chicago, so you could be with him as long as possible. What is more, I'm going to see that you like Chicago as well as you did New York; for the Garden City is the loveliest place in the world to one who understands."

"It was kind of you," gratefully declared Marje, having decided that her aunt had made handsome atonement for the way she had neglected them in the past. The others added words of appreciation — each in his own way — leaving Mrs. Fortune again embarrassed. Apparently she was not ac-

customed to hearing such heart-felt expressions of gratitude, and was thinking they might have been prompted by sentiment.

"Indeed it was noble of you," added Ned with emphasis. "There was nothing I wanted more than to see my chicks again. You see, I've been father to them so long; yet I've always had to be separated from them. I have to work to keep them comfortable — and I love that; but I hate the long waits between visits. Some day I hope to have them with me in New York all the time. We shall have a flat of our own —"

"With a radiator that bubbles, and a door-bell you don't have to pull at," put in Rex, from his perch on the arm of the couch.

"Yes — but it will be a very modest little place," assured Ned as he gazed over the beautiful drawing-room of his aunt. This apartment was a feast to the eye, with its costly rugs and upholstery of apple-green velvet, its cream-lace curtains and rose-colored draperies; but most attractive of all was the round bay-window — much like an opera-box; it commanded a splendid view of Grand Boulevard, which was divided into two avenues by a long strip of green park-way with rows of sturdy trees extending farther than the eye could reach.

"I don't believe luxuries add to one's real happiness," said Mrs. Fortune, puckering her brow as if she were assailed by some uncanny thought that never before had entered her mind. "I've been comfortable for so long — just plain comfortable; and I don't believe it's good for the health." At this strange remark, the youngsters all stared at her curiously, but listened all the more respectfully as she went on: "I've needed more people around me — more things to be interested in, even though once in a while I might find somebody whose views were contrary to my own."

"I'm sure our little family will keep you busy for a while," laughed Ned. "They all have their own opinions, and Bess says they can make more noise than any other family in Johnstown; yet they manage to enjoy life. The week will fly away before you realize it, Aunt Esther."

"I wish the Convention would last longer," said Mrs. Fortune wistfully. "Don't you think you could all stay over a few days after it closes, Ned? It takes more than a week to get the feeblest idea of Chicago, or to get acquainted with a peculiar aunt."

"No; my duties compel me to get back to New York within a day or two after the Convention

closes," Ned assured her. "Perhaps the children can stay a while longer —"

"We'll not stay an hour after you leave," said Marje firmly. "We'll all go back with you as far as Johnstown. Then Bess will meet you there at the train and have a little visit with you before you go on to New York."

"Don't talk about the home-going yet," begged Mrs. Fortune, who by this time was beginning to enjoy the coziness of having youngsters around her. "Think of me all alone in this great apartment, with nobody to keep me company but Cora, my new maid — a girl that just came to me this morning; and I don't know a thing about her. But I promise to make up for the way I've neglected you; I'm going to be interested in somebody besides myself. How old are you, Carl?"

"Fifteen — quite a little past," replied Carl with dignity. "I think I look younger —"

"And his voice is changing," put in Jean with a tantalizing snicker.

"Never mind that," protested Carl, vexed at his sister's audacity in pointing out such a serious defect in his manhood.

"And you are just a year younger than Carl — aren't you, Marjorie?" continued Mrs. Fortune,

turning her attention to the elder of the two girls, who still wore her hair in heavy braids, and — though the mother of the family during Bess's absence — was very girlish in appearance.

"Yes," admitted Marje. "I'm a Freshman in the high school, and Carl is a Sophomore. I'm slow in Mathematics, but I help Carl with his Latin —"

"Right you are," retorted Carl. "She couldn't do a thing with Algebra if it wasn't for me. She wouldn't know an unknown quantity if she found it in her soup. But she's glib enough of the tongue when it comes to languages —"

"There seems to be considerable class spirit in our family," remarked Mrs. Fortune, in a manner indicating that she was pleased at the discovery. She twitched one of Marje's heavy braids and looked at Carl with new mischief in her eyes.

"Bess and I always tried to rival each other, too," said Ned, smiling in recollection of those endeared days before he had to leave school to help support a family. "Bess actually couldn't remember anything about Geometry except that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points — and half the time she forgot that. Yet she was

a great help to me in my English Composition. How I hated it! I never could get up a decent essay."

"One never knows how a child is going to develop," said Mrs. Fortune, gazing at him proudly. "Now you earn your living by making use of the English Composition you used to hate. And how old is Jean?"

"Ten," promptly replied Jean. "I'll be eleven in October. I'm rather small, like Bess."

Ned noted that Mrs. Fortune's gaze softened still more as it rested upon Jean. It was plain to him that his aunt — like everybody else — was getting ready to spoil Jean completely, simply for the reason that she was the beauty of the family, with her dark curls and blue eyes, her delicate complexion and clear-cut features.

"I'm going to be either an actress or a trained nurse," volunteered Jean, though her aunt had no intention of inquiring about her future vocation; in truth, the attractive little girl reminded her of a very lovely doll that never should know the meaning of work.

"You told me you wanted to be a lady-policeman," reminded Rex. "But I don't believe you'd be any good at it — you're too afraid. Marje

would be a better one; she's fatter and knows how to boss."

No one save Aunt Esther smiled at this rather personal remark; they had long banded together to discourage what they termed the "smartness" of this youthful prodigy. Jean, nevertheless, thought an explanation necessary, inasmuch as Mrs. Fortune was still comparatively strange to them. "I'll never be big enough to make an arrest," she said, "nor to do very heavy work for a sick person. I'm going to be small, like Bess. Why, Aunt Esther, she's nineteen and only weighs a hundred!"

"Yet she can do more work than a woman twice her size," boasted Carl. "She's managed to bring us all up — and that's no easy task. You can't judge of a woman's ability by her size."

"She must be a remarkable girl," endorsed his aunt. "I shouldn't know Bessie if I should see her — it's a shame! I've never done a thing for her except to send her a Christmas card now and then, and a telegram when my dear husband died. What a selfish world mine has been!"

"But Bess thinks a great deal of you," declared the kind-hearted Jean, who had never nursed a grudge against anybody, possibly for the reason that the world had always been so kind to her. "I've

heard her say several times that you were Mother's favorite sister."

"How nice of her!" Mrs. Fortune was lost in grateful revery for a few moments, then she said suddenly: "Yes, I believe I was. Blanche was a remarkable woman — sweet and gentle without being too tame. I imagine Bess must be like her. Now Rex, it's your turn. How old are you?"

"Eight — goin' on nine," sang out the little fellow from his perch. "I'm goin' to be a preacher, like Mr. Rhodes, or a grocer, like Mr. Crane."

"Oh, he doesn't know what he's going to be," sputtered Jean with a derisive laugh. "He wouldn't make a good preacher, because his temper is too quick; and he wouldn't make a good grocer, because he'd eat everything there was to sell."

Mrs. Fortune laughed, with the delicacy that characterized everything she did. In truth, she herself was delicately pretty, even to the tips of her polished nails. So becoming was her laugh, the children were all possessed with the desire to keep her at it indefinitely; that was why they continued to make amusing remarks till her spirits were elevated far beyond any thought of herself. She was finding out, for the first time, that twentieth century children are very much like their elders.

"Did you find my family at the station to-day without any trouble, Aunt Esther?" inquired Ned.

"Yes, and I knew them at sight," was his aunt's pleased reply. "They were all standing together in a huddle when I went up and introduced myself. Just think of a woman having to introduce herself to her nieces and nephews!"

"I knew it was Aunt Esther before she spoke," said Marje. "We have an old photograph of her at home — one taken when she was a girl."

"And she brought us home in a splendid motor-car," raved Jean.

But while they were taking turns in declaring their loyalty to Aunt Esther and Chicago in general, the bell rang, and soon Cora had ushered into their midst a boy of perhaps sixteen, tall and slender; he had dark eyes and a face slightly freckled and sun-burnt. Evidently he was a lad fond of having a good time out-of-doors. Mrs. Fortune rose to greet him.

"It was so nice of you to be prompt," she said as she turned to face her expectant nephews and nieces. "I invited Mr. Gath Singleton to come over and meet you, children. He's a Chicago boy — born and bred on this good old prairie soil; he's

promised to visit you often. You see, because of my bothersome headaches, I'm likely to be laid up a part of the time."

Then she introduced the young stranger to each of her guests separately. Carl, with the shrewd eyes of a boy sizing up the points of a lad his own age, thought he should like Gath Singleton; for the stranger did not seem to be a "smarty," nor did he put on airs.

"I appreciate your courtesy, Mr. Singleton," said Ned graciously as he shook hands with the boy. "I have to be at the big Convention most of the time, yet I want my family to see Chicago with somebody that is familiar with it."

"You're the first Chicago boy I ever saw," admitted Rex as he continued staring at Gath Singleton with eyes mirroring both surprise and admiration.

"I suppose you're amazed because I'm not an Indian," laughed the newcomer. "You Eastern people have such funny ideas about the West. I suppose you expected to find us running around on the streets, all wearing blankets and killing deer with bows and arrows —"

"Oh, that would be splendid!" cried the romantic Jean, clapping her hands at the mere thought of such

a succession of lovely thrills. "I just love those movie-pictures about the West."

"But you'll find Chicago highly civilized, Jean dear," put in Mrs. Fortune. "It is truly an exciting city — but not in the way you expect. I hope you're not disappointed."

"No, I'm not disappointed," declared Jean. "Chicago is scarey enough without having Indians. I was frightened when we pulled into the big station to-day. It seemed so big — and there were such terrible roars and clatterings. It made Pittsburgh seem like a small town on Sunday."

"And such clouds of dust!" cried Marje. "There were little pieces of coal flying around everywhere — just like Pittsburgh, only there was more of it — and it kept perching on people's noses and getting into their eyes. Everything seemed charged with some strange force, something like electricity — and everybody was rushing around and not paying attention to anybody else. It would be terrible to get lost in Chicago."

"It's a busy place, to be sure," said young Singleton with the town pride that ever adorns one born in the Garden City. Seated in an easy chair and facing the group, he continued with growing emphasis: "Chicago is the big stock and grain cen-

ter of the world. Everybody has to hustle; everybody is supposed to work — have something important to do. Why, if a fellow stopped in the middle of the street to visit a friend — as I've seen 'em do in Boston — the policeman would whack 'em with their billies and tell 'em to move on; they'd probably arrest 'em. And if we people didn't move fast, we'd never get anywhere. Don't you realize that our city has a water front on Lake Michigan extending over thirty miles? When I leave my home on the South Side, to go to a party on the West or the North Side — why, the party would be over before I got there, if I didn't scramble as hard as I could! None of you people will be so slow after you've been here a few days; you'll hurry like the rest of us. And you'll learn to like the coal-dust. It seems to get into the blood — and it inspires us to do great things. It makes us want to fly. It — it makes us feel that we want to do more than our share to keep this big city one of the world's greatest commercial centers."

Mrs. Fortune smiled somewhat dubiously, yet in approval of the boy's zest. Though she loved Chicago, the coal-dust had no such moral effect upon her. "I believe Gath is honest in what he is saying," she declared. "I've lived here many

years — and, somehow or other, I can't stay away long, though I've tried to live in Paris. I believe, after all, the charm of any place is the people one meets. That's why I like Chicago, I suppose. The poor giantess really does seem rather soiled and boisterous; but that's because she has been so busy growing, she's only beginning to beautify herself. Yet it's marvelous how fair she is, in spite of her grime, and what an art stronghold she is making herself. Some day when her present plans have been carried out, she'll lift her head and be adored as the City Beautiful."

"Aunt Esther is like the other Chicagoans — always blowing about the place," laughed Ned. "No wonder they call this the Windy City. Yet I believe I like the Chicago way of standing up for its own shrines and citadels; it seems to be a loyal sort of place."

"But do all the girls here have big feet?" Jean in all earnestness had asked this question of Gath Singleton for enlightenment on a subject that appealed to her far more than his subsequent talk about the Board of Trade and other famous haunts.

"Of course not," retorted Gath, blushing considerably. "What a funny question to ask! Why should their feet be bigger here than if they lived

somewhere else? I think that's another of those St. Louis yarns."

"Jean didn't mean to be flippant," apologized Ned much amused. "Her question was honest, but it didn't fit into the right place."

"My great-grandfather left some very interesting documents," Gath resumed, after he had entirely recovered from Jean's question. "He was one of the first white children born here — so I'm sure they must be accurate. In his day, no one ever dreamed that Chicago would turn out to be the second largest American city — and probably, ten years from now, be the greatest city in the world —"

All the others laughed again; for Gath had lost control of himself in the warmth of his enthusiasm. But the Merrymakers were inclined to be lenient with him; they adored loyalty, even at the expense of discretion.

"Once upon a time," persisted Gath, "this stretch of flat land on which the city stands was a green prairie dotted with flowers. And there were Indians and wolves and bears —"

"Wild ones?" queried Rex, pricking up his ears.

"Wild as could be," assured Gath, encouraged by the child's interest. "Everything in those days was wild — the animals, the roses, the strawberries,

and even the onions. In 1796, the first settler with a Christian name came to this prairie and built a rude hut near the heart of the present city. He was a colored man named Baptiste au Sable, and there seems to have been a great many ways of spelling his name. He finally sold his hut to a Frenchman named Le Mai. Then John Kinzie, an agent for the great American Fur Company founded by the Astors, bought the place and lived there many years. In front of the house was a yard surrounded by a low fence; four tall trees stood in a row behind the fence. Kinzie was a good citizen — as civilized as any of the Pilgrim Fathers —"

"But what about the colored man — did the Indians get his scalp?" asked Rex, eager for more thrills.

"I don't know; I think he must have died. But that wouldn't make any difference; he hadn't anything to do with the history of Chicago — he was just an Eastern transient, I suppose. At that time there wasn't any town here. All this territory was a part of Indiana, and Vincennes was the seat of government. Then in 1804 Fort Dearborn was erected, and a little village sprang up surrounding it. Whenever an Indian raid took place, the people

fled to the fort. Grandfather said the pioneers of this city wrote their history in blood; but they were plucky, and such good fighters nothing could drive them away. Twenty-five years later, the town had a population of four thousand; most of the old families were French."

"Where did Chicago get its name?" asked Carl when Gath paused to recall other data.

"There are differences of opinion as to that," Gath said with a puzzled countenance and a show of reluctance. "Some say the name comes from the Indian word meaning 'wild onion'; but my family insists that it comes from the beautiful Indian word 'checaque,' meaning 'thunder'—"

"That sounds more like it," bantered Ned. "Chicago, thy name is Thunder!"

"But others say the name means 'the voice of the great Manitou,' which I think is more appropriate," went on Gath.

"Long live Manitou and his powerful voice!" cried Mrs. Fortune. "Chicago speaks with the voice of thunder, and her motto is 'I Will'! She is likely to dot the map as long as the world exists."

"She's more likely to swallow the map if she keeps on growing so fast," said Gath with pardonable pride. "Look at her now with nearly three

million inhabitants. See her streaking up the North Shore into Wisconsin, and down into Indiana. There's no limit to her size."

The young Merrymakers, who by this time were inclined to think Gath's loyalty to his native city highly laudable, were beginning to ply him with other questions when he hurried on with his narrative: "No city has had a more unfavorable beginning, nor grown so rapidly. You'll be surprised when you see our splendid hotels, though the first tavern was built here as late as 1829. A man named Caldwell was the proprietor, and his guests could get three square meals a day and a room for only a dollar. Horses were boarded in the stable — and they had all the hay and grain they wanted for twenty-five cents a night."

"And did the folks finally chase all the wolves and Indians away?" inquired Rex, more interested in the remote days when Chicago was wild and woolly.

"Yes — and they had a great deal of fun with them at the last. My great-grandfather said the first settlers were capital wolf hunters. At these hunts they would chase the animals out on the ice bordering the lake, and the people would stand on the shore and look on."

But Gath neglected to state what disposition was made of the wolves after they were thus put on ice. In his impulsive and rather jerky fashion he went on to explain how Chicago began to grow so rapidly that all the remaining Indians and wolves were glad to seek homes elsewhere.

"Gath had to write an essay on Chicago just before school closed," explained Mrs. Fortune; "so it's easy for him to remember most of the facts. He also has considerable information, though I dare say some of it might be disputed. Yet I'm sure his great-grandfather ought to have known as much about Chicago as some others did."

"I've proven most of his records in the Chicago Historical Library and two of the public libraries," said Gath, his tongue fairly racing with his mind as he continued with superb faith in his great-grandfather's chronicles: "The first school-master was John Watkins; the first school that might be called public was opened in a stable in 1832. It was only twelve feet square, and its benches and desks were nothing more than store-boxes. At that time there were only thirty children in the town — most of them Indians — and only a few of them old enough to go to school. Before that time, Mrs. Stephen Forbes had a tiny private school —"

"So the first school-teacher in Chicago was a woman," announced Marje, much elated.

"Yes — so the records say," admitted Gath. "And the first Sunday-school teacher was named Carpentier. The first minister to arrive here was a Methodist named Walker. A month later, a Presbyterian minister named Parker settled here. The Methodists had the first library, and a man named Wright had charge of it. He used to move the library from place to place in a silk handkerchief — later, he got a basket — but you'll change your laugh when you all see the splendid libraries we have to-day, with acres and acres of floor space, and tons and tons of books."

"Do you know anything about the first newspaper published here?" queried Ned, thinking he had cornered the well-posted Chicagoan. "You see, I'm a journalist, and I've always heard that your newspapers are unusually progressive."

"The first one was called *The Chicago Daily American,* published in 1839 — though I think they changed the name afterwards," spoke Gath with alacrity. "It had a hard time of it at first; on the first page of the first issue was printed this message: 'We now launch our humble bark on the

great ocean of this world, with plenty of sheet, but with no certainty of *sale.*'"

"Rather clever," laughed Ned, seeing the point. "It seems that many similar barks have been launched in this city since that time."

"I think most historians agree that the first white child born here was Ellen M. Kinzie; and her marriage to Dr. Alexander Wolcott was the first one; I guess they had a very handsome wedding for those days."

Thus Gath went on, gaining confidence as he noted the interest gleaming in the eyes of the others. With considerable eloquence, for a boy of sixteen, he told of the Great Fire of 1871 — a fire that had destroyed many lives and millions of dollars worth of property. Then he told of the modern Chicago, built upon the smoking embers of the old city; of her growing influence as an art and a commercial center, her massive public buildings resting upon floating foundations, her schools and universities, her emporiums of fashion, her places of amusement, and her beautiful suburbs; likewise, he spent some time describing her immense freight tunnel underlying the surface and relieving the city of the bulk of her freight traffic. Nor did the Merrymakers blame him for swelling his sails to their utmost.

On the other hand, they admired him for his devotion to his native town. They marveled, nevertheless, that he should neglect to mention the stock-yards and the packing-plants; for, like many other outsiders, they had imagined that this very important chain of industries formed the center of the city — just as Fort Dearborn formerly had — and that all the other attractions were secondary.

"I'm sorry I have to leave now," Ned finally said as he rose and looked at his watch. "I'd like to hear Mr. Gath Singleton go on for another hour; but I have to hurry back to my preliminaries that mark the beginning of the Convention. Jack Gore will think something has happened to me."

"Can't you come back to dinner?" asked Mrs. Fortune. "Please don't stay down town unless it's necessary; you know, my house is always open to you."

Ned thankfully agreed to return for dinner, whereupon Mrs. Fortune went out to the kitchen to see how her new maid was progressing; though if there were anything she hated, it was the occasional pilgrimages she had to make to that overheated region during the process of breaking in a green servant.

"I think I'll go home," announced Gath Single-

ton, rising to make a hasty exit. "I live out on Drexel Boulevard, and I have to get back early. Father and Mother are getting ready to go up to Green Bay for several weeks, and I must help them pack; I'll try to see you all to-morrow. I hope you don't think I'm a public speaker; really, your aunt was to blame for getting me to tell you a few things about Chicago."

The Merrymakers again assured him that his talk had been most interesting, and that none of them was base enough to imagine for one minute that he had ever done any professional speaking. When he had gone, they agreed that they liked him exceedingly well, and the girls wished he had two sisters much like himself and near their own ages.

"I hope you'll all be very considerate of Aunt Esther," Ned admonished as he stood dusting his straw hat. "When I made my first call on her — just a day or two ago — she was sitting here alone in the dusk; she was grieving because she had nobody to take an interest in. It didn't take me long to hint that all she needed to do was to send you a telegram, and before she knew it the house would be alive with youngsters. I didn't mean for her to wire the money; but she was determined to do it. Now let's all show how grateful we can be for

such an unusual act of courtesy. Remember, if she were actually selfish, she would have preferred to take a trip to Mackinac where it's cool and pleasant."

"Dear Aunt Esther!" said Marje sympathetically. "She must have had a great deal of trouble; perhaps we can help her bear it. Think of having to depend on a cook all these years! I'd much rather be one of a big family, and have to slave most of the time to keep things going."

Though Ned was only going down to the Coliseum — a short distance away — and would be back that evening, he was so much delighted at once more being with his family, he kissed the girls affectionately and shook the hands of his brothers as if he were going forth on a long journey. Moreover, the others all stood in the bay-window and waved at him, as far as they could see him; nor was he ashamed to wave back and smile his broadest, despite the warm weather and the heavy work ahead of him.

But hardly had he disappeared from sight when Mrs. Fortune came back into the drawing-room. She was pale and nervous, though she smiled weakly as she sat down in the easiest chair.

"What's the matter?" cried Marje, springing to

her side. "Are you ill — or is it the hot weather? Shan't I do something for you?"

"No, dear," was the faint reply. "The very worst has happened to me again — just as I expected."

The Merrymakers looked at her in alarm. Surely the worst that could happen to their aunt deserved the exercise of their most sincere sympathy and support.

"Do tell us, Aunt Esther," begged Jean. "Whatever it is, we'll all get together and help you out of it."

"My cook has gone — gone for good!" moaned the woman, in spite of her heroic attempt to be brave.

"Is that all?" cried Marje, much relieved.

"Well, isn't that enough?" Mrs. Fortune gazed back at her niece and shuddered as though the thermometer had suddenly dropped to zero. "Think of me with guests on my hands — five youngsters!" she almost wailed. "And not a soul to do a thing for me — no dinner started — everything in the kitchen upside-down! And it's hot enough to boil an egg on the window-sill!"

Before she could finish her plaints, however, and append a long list of uncomplimentary remarks con-

cerning the new cook, Cora, the children were laughing almost boisterously. By that time they were positive that their aunt's sprightly imagination was more to blame than the stern realities that seemed to be confronting her.

"I only hired Cora this morning," she went on helplessly. "I've had such a dreadful time getting a girl that would act as maid and cook both — though I'm all alone and easy to get along with. Not one of them ever stays longer than a week, and I'm worried to death. When this girl came to me this morning to work by the day, I didn't ask any questions. I just set her to work, and was glad enough to have her. Now she's gone! When I went out a few minutes ago, there she was, all dressed for the street — purple parasol and all. She said she didn't know I was going to run a boarding-house and have a lot of young ones around, this hot weather — and that her back was weak — and her mother had rheumatism — and I don't know what all! It's disgusting!"

"And is she gone?" questioned Carl, still unable to decipher his aunt's perplexities.

"Yes — she took her day's pay and streaked it down the back stairs as fast as her high heels could take her. I even offered to double her wages,

but she scorned me. I don't know what people are going to do for help; it's getting worse every day."

"I think it's just as Ned says," suggested Carl, by no means worried over the scarcity of domestic help; "people are going to do their own work. And the larger the family, the easier it will be for them."

Aunt Esther failed to be illuminated by such a flighty theory. She looked vaguely at the speaker till Marje intervened with one of her practical deductions. "Don't you worry, Auntie," she said; "it isn't worth while. I'm sure we can get up a dinner that'll suit you. And we'll all enjoy it more than to have that cross-looking Cora hovering over us. I didn't like the welcome she gave us; it seemed to be put on. Now I can't give lectures like Gath Singleton, but I can cook. And the rest can help. We'll all coöperate and get up a meal."

"But I don't know how," confessed Mrs. Fortune, no less disgruntled than if Marge had suggested that they all hang by their toes from one of the iron balconies.

But before Mrs. Fortune could offer any excuses for her lack of education in the very necessary art of preparing a meal, Marje had seized her by the hand and kissed her warmly on the forehead.

"We'll make it easy for you, Aunt Esther," she chuckled. "We'll run back and get things to going; and we'll call you when it's time to eat. You sit here and keep cool till Ned comes."

CHAPTER II

AT THE WHITE CITY

DURING all her widowhood, Mrs. Fortune had never known so much joy as when she sat at breakfast next morning with her nephews and nieces from Johnstown. She was at the head of the table pouring coffee; Ned at the foot was serving ham and eggs; while Marje and the others each had something else to do, in order to make the table service complete. The sun was slanting in through the low French-windows overlooking the tree-tops to the north; the canary birds in wicker cages overhanging the iron balcony were singing themselves hoarse; and the goldfish were moving about in their square aquarium with unusual briskness, as if they knew the house was filled with lively company.

"I don't know what I should have done without you children," Aunt Esther was saying. "It's a treat to see you two girls get up a meal, and without the least trouble. I do hope I can get a cook soon. I'm discouraged over the servant question; it seems that no one can get help except the very rich people."

"Don't worry about that, Auntie," soothed Marje for the dozenth time. She had changed her gingham apron for a white one, and was flushed and beaming, as she always was whenever she came out of the kitchen. "We can get along capitally, all the time we're here, and still have plenty of time to see the sights. We all know how to work together, and it's great fun."

"I don't mind running a vacuum-cleaner; so I'll clean all the rugs in a jiffy," volunteered Carl.

"And I'll do the dusting," promised Jean. "Bess says I'm an expert duster; I never leave any soiled corners."

"You'll find it a task, Jean," warned Mrs. Fortune. "My apartment is as long as a freight-train."

"Dusting is very good exercise," said Ned, approving Jean with a nod and a smile. "Physical directors say it adds to the grace of the body and tones the muscles one never uses in walking or running; besides, Jean likes to dust."

"But it seems odd to see a big boy like Carl taking an interest in keeping the house in order," laughed Mrs. Fortune, though she seemed pleased at his originality. "I always thought boys of fifteen did nothing but keep the house untidy — throw

their hats and coats everywhere — and all those things."

"They do, sometimes," answered Marje. "But Carl is pretty good about being careful, unless he's late for school or has to rush off to a ball game. Bess was determined he should know how much trouble it is to keep a house straight, even if she had to put him in the Navy where they make the boys wash dishes and mop and knit. He does all the heavy work about the house, such as carrying in coal, emptying ashes, and —"

"But I beat the rugs," enthusiastically boasted Rex. He was seated on a chair heightened by the addition of a big dictionary, and was taking an animated part in the conversation. "Carl puts the rugs on the clothes-line — and I get the beater. I always play the rugs are people I don't like — those mean Hodge boys next door or somebody; you bet I make the dust fly."

"You mustn't talk that way," reproved Marje, fearing that Mrs. Fortune had discovered another weakness in Rex's character. "It would be nicer if you played the rugs were people you like — and that you are a doctor trying to cure them of their diseases. It's no wonder you beat the borders off of our bath-room rugs."

Rex was not concerned with this mild rebuke from the sister compelled to act as mother when Bess was not with them. The truth is, he did not regard Marje as much of an authority, else he would not have spent so much time taking advantage of her. So he sat eating his porridge and wondering what festivities would be called forth by that lovely day.

"I have to hurry away," declared Ned as he hastily rose and folded his napkin. "I'd like to stay and chat all the morning; but I'll have to work till Aunt Esther picks me up at the Coliseum this afternoon. I hope you feel equal to the emergencies of the day, Auntie."

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Fortune responded with unprecedented zest. "This is the first morning in years I haven't got up with a dull, aching heart and a head to correspond with it. And it's the first time since my marriage that I haven't had a maid to wake me. I'm feeling very fit; I'll call for you as I promised."

This time Aunt Esther did not look embarrassed nor half-hearted when her oldest nephew kissed her on the forehead, and repeated the same ceremony with his sisters. She had never associated kissing with an early breakfast; yet if that were

the custom of her warm-hearted relatives she would not say a word to change the rule. Then too, kisses applied to the brow or cheek were not apt to be fatal.

"What a dear boy he is!" she exclaimed when Ned had fled from the apartment amid a demonstration of good will that reminded her of some president leaving the United States to the tune of a farewell celebration on the dock.

"Indeed he is," loyally championed Marje. "Just think how long he's been our father, Aunt Esther — and Bess our mother! I don't believe any other children ever had such young parents or any better ones."

"He carries too much responsibility for a boy of twenty-three," declared Mrs. Fortune with a sigh. "Just think of it! How many years I've wasted grieving over the departed dead and making myself the most miserable of women! I'm so glad the dear boy hinted that he wanted me to send for you. Now I'm going to make up for my past selfishness —"

"Hooray for Aunt Esther — whoopee!" shouted young Rex; though Marje glanced reprovingly at him and colored deeply. She knew very well that Rex was mercenary enough to be more interested

in visions of ice-cream cones and other dispensations of his aunt's bounty than in her complete change of heart.

"You've never been selfish, Aunt Esther," Marje said with great positiveness. "People living alone usually get into ruts, and they can't help it."

"And the longer they live alone, the fussier they get," put in Carl with less tact. "They get so strong in their dislikes, and so critical —"

"Aunt Esther would never get that way in a thousand years," interrupted Marje with great warmth. "You mustn't think Carl meant you, Auntie. You see, our family has always stood for free speech, and we say pretty much what we please to one another — though we try not to say anything that stings. Bess says it's always better to talk over matters and have an understanding, rather than to keep on hoarding up misunderstandings till some breach might be made that can never be mended."

Aunt Esther said nothing. She was amazed at the many new angles life had presented to her since the advent of her young relatives. Somehow or other, the Merrymakers had a few healthy philosophies tucked away in their young brains; yet they were not unbearably priggish nor goody-goody.

She made up her mind to study each of them, and find out what great principle it was that held them together as one firmly united family, even though their temperaments were as different as the flowers blooming in her window-boxes. There was Carl, just at the age when so many lads outgrow their parents and their sisters; yet he was thoughtful, and chivalrous to such an extent that he would willingly give up his boyish amusements to help Bess and Marje with their many duties, and strive every minute to keep his family united in spirit. Then there was motherly Marje, designed by Nature to perform tasks that always fall upon the robust and capable; for she was stronger physically than her older sister, Bess, and — according to reports — an inch taller. What a woman she would make! And with all her constant reminders that she must not be herself, but a model for the rest, how patient and charitable she was towards all! Possibly she would be rather plump, like her father's people; and her heavy braids, her healthy color, and her deep brown eyes seemed to proclaim that she was a very substantial sort of person, and genuine to the heart's core. Marje was one to be relied upon when others seemed doubtful. Yet Aunt Esther could not help but favor Jean, inasmuch as

she was one of those lovable little souls that cling and believe; they surely had their places in this great world choked with evil weeds. As for Rex, she was unable to make him out in less than twenty-four hours. Evidently he was a boy through and through — a baby perhaps in the presence of his elder brothers and sisters, but a plucky little man when compelled to follow out his own resources. In truth, she did not stop long enough to think much about Rex. He was amusing, and that was quite enough for Aunt Esther; he made her think of her own hoydenish days of the long ago.

"Now Carl, while Jean and I pick up the dishes, you must write another card to Bess," Marje was saying. "You can write so much faster than the rest of us; it won't take you ten minutes. We'll have this house in order before long. No, Rex, you can't go out in the street; and Aunt Esther hasn't any yard to play in. Please be a good boy; you can help to dust all that nice parlor-furniture. And Jean, we must be careful of Aunt Esther's dishes; I'd hate to break one of them."

"They're so lovely," complimented Jean, beginning to clear the table with caution seldom shown by such maids as Cora. "I think the silverware is lovely, too; I'm going to polish it before long."

"But what am I to do?" queried Mrs. Fortune. "I never felt so incompetent in my life."

"You can boss 'em, Aunt Esther," suggested Rex, thus proving to the lady of the house that his own model family was accustomed to a task-mistress.

"Wouldn't you like to tidy up your bedroom?" suggested Marje with wavering modesty. "Don't try to make the bed; for Jean and I can do that in five minutes — that is, if we work together. We have a little song we sing; it's very foolish, but —"

"I'll sing it," broke in enthusiastic Jean — in spite of Marje's protests and still higher coloring beginning to sing in a childish voice pitched unnecessarily high:

"Now we see Aunt Esther's bed — all in a heap;
We must fix it nice and smooth — so she can sleep.
Hang the bed-clothes on a chair,
Open windows — let them air,
Turn the mattress, drive dull care
Far, far away.

"First we place and tuck inside — Aunt Esther's sheet;
Pat the pillows, set them up — how nice and neat!
Lay the other sheet on bed,
Then the blanket, then the spread,
Smooth them till each lump has fled
Far, far away.

"Now be sure the coverings — are tucked about,
So Aunt Esther's tootsies won't — come working out;
Now the bed is made, it seems;
May it call forth happy themes,
Till she flees on restful dreams,
Far, far away."

But by this time Aunt Esther was helpless with laughter — just as she had the right to be, considering that she had not indulged in such a pastime for many years, owing to the fact that she had always depended upon people of her own age for her amusement.

"There's another verse about the pillow-shams, but we cut that out," earnestly explained Jean. "Nobody uses pillow-shams now."

"It's a very ingenious song — you dear thing!" cried Mrs. Fortune, trying in vain to match Jean in her sober earnestness. "How many different ways there are of making beds! I think I'll have you write down your recipe, so I can learn the business right away, since I haven't any maid to wait on me. But dear — don't you think you should pause a little between lines and let the bedclothes air? It seems that you gallop along too fast."

Jean looked at her a moment, her eyes wide and round, as she replied with the same funny serious-

ness that had almost succeeded in killing her aunt outright, though Mrs. Fortune was not a woman given to excessive laughter: "Oh, we sing very slowly — it takes about eight minutes. And when anybody gets up in the morning, at our house, we expect 'em to spread out their bed-clothes and open the windows, so everything will be ready when Marje and I go the rounds."

"It's such a comical little song — where did you learn it?" asked the aunt, childishly interested.

"Marje made it up," said Jean proudly. "Marje is going to be a great poetess. She's written some of the loveliest poems for house use I ever heard."

"Oh, Jean, you make me so ashamed!" protested her sister. "You forget I'm past fourteen, and ought to know better than to write such stuff." Marje, nevertheless, was equally as much amused as her aunt; she laughed mischievously as she went on: "I did it for Jean's sake. She's a little girl yet, and likes to enjoy herself, even when she makes beds; and I suppose at heart I'm just as young."

"That's right, Marje," stoutly approved Mrs. Fortune, cuddling Jean; "don't be a young lady till it's necessary, then never forget that you were once a child. One has to be an old woman so long,

it gets tiresome. I think the song very appropriate, and I want to hear you sing it to all the beds in the house. The tune is comical enough to make a statue laugh. Let me think — where did I hear it before?"

"It's an old, old tune," enlightened Carl. "Once, we boys put words to it and sang it when we went through Greensburg in a moving-van. It sounded terribly funny, and we made a lot of racket. It went something like this:

'Greensburg maidens they are fair — far, far away;
They would give a boy a scare —'most any day —'"

"I'm going to change the tune," said Marje, feigning great disgust. "How could you join in singing such a hoodlum thing, when you know my dearest friend, Sophie Alleman, lives in Greensburg? Then too, the grammar of your song is terrible."

"We only sung it once, and that was the day the Greensburg baseball team beat ours five to one, and the umpire wasn't fair, and we all felt sore about it," explained Carl lightly; for he was inclined to think Marje's criticism just. "I don't believe we would have sung it if the Greensburg girls hadn't roasted us so."

But by this time the dishwashing was in progress, and Jean was raving over her aunt's "darling china-closets" and their precious contents. So Carl went to the hall-library to write to Bess; while Rex, forgetting all sense of duty, proceeded to turn the chaise-longue in the drawing-room into a Pullman coach. During the reign of these various occupations, Mrs. Fortune came out of her bedroom and sought Marje; she seemed pale and nervous. Marje, obeying her aunt's excited beckoning, followed her back to her room.

"What is it, Auntie?" she whispered, closing the door behind her.

"I've been robbed!" exclaimed Mrs. Fortune, though she expressed herself with more propriety than if she had been alone with a maid. "But please don't tell the others — please keep it secret."

"Robbed?" The word rang in Marje's ears like a sudden fire-alarm too close to be comfortable. She sat down on the bed while her aunt continued rummaging through the drawers of her chiffonier. It seemed that the lady continued the frantic search an incredibly long time, while her niece sat there shuddering and awaiting further explanation.

"Strange, I never missed the things till five minutes ago," gasped the aunt, continuing her search

by opening the door of her closet and examining all the hooks, most of which were supporting handsome black gowns and wraps on stretchers.

"What's missing, Auntie?" The girl could hardly ask the question, and it seemed another age before she received a reply.

"My summer furs are gone — and a pin I wouldn't part with for anything in the world," announced her aunt. "It was a gift from my dear husband. I also miss a pair of ear-rings — beautiful jet pendants I got in Rome —"

"And what else?"

"The land only knows! I suppose there must be many other things gone, but I can't place them now. You see, the maid I had before Cora used to look after my things. I never bothered anything about where my valuables were put, just so she brought them to me when I wanted to wear them. Oh, dear, I've been such an irresponsible woman!"

All the time Mrs. Fortune was speaking, she made excited gestures and her face was very serious; but for once she was thinking of the happiness of other people, so did not wish to make her predicament public. She knew Marje was the one to help her. "I think my house must have been

gone through by some burglar yesterday afternoon when I went to the station to meet you," she said. "But I haven't found any traces of burglary in any of the other rooms."

"But you wore your summer furs — I saw them," assured Marje. "I remember how I had to shake Rex to keep him from asking you why city women wore furs in the summer and went around with their necks bare during the winter."

"Sure enough — I remember now. But what could have happened to them?"

"Are you sure you looked everywhere?" inquired the girl, leaping up to continue the investigation more thoroughly. "Your things seem to be rather badly tossed around."

"Let's not search any more," begged the aunt, laying a restraining hand on her niece's arm. "If anything more is missing, I don't want to know it now."

Marje could not understand the philosophy of one who refused to find out the worst of a situation, but tried to evade it as long as possible. She was beginning to understand why her aunt and her mother had kept growing less and less congenial till they had finally drifted apart; they were as different as air and water.

"But Auntie, this theft should be reported," she insisted.

"Reported — how? Indeed, I'm not going to report it — and get written up in the newspapers and all that."

"But we should telephone some detective agency, shouldn't we? We ought to get a detective here right away, or a — a policeman."

Mrs. Fortune laughed — actually laughed in the face of what she would have considered a great calamity twenty-four hours before. "What good would a detective or a policeman do — hours and hours after the things have been stolen? Detectives and newspapers pull together; the whole world would hear about it — and all the thieves in Chicago would find out that I had valuables worth stealing, and make my life miserable. No, indeed — I shall bear my loss with fortitude, and with dignity. But I hope the wicked burglar that stole them will never have a moment's rest till he brings them back. I'd like to tell him what I think of him. I'm sure he must have climbed into my pantry window — it's always open."

"But a burglar doesn't necessarily have to be a man," said Marje, her serious face imbedded in her plump hands as she leaned against her aunt's dress-

ing-table. "I'm almost sure the thief was a woman."

"But what woman could climb into a window in broad daylight? That's out of the question," scoffed Mrs. Fortune.

"Perhaps she didn't climb in at the window. You may have let her in by the front door."

"No, Marje; you're either mistaken, or else I do strange things in my sleep." Even then Mrs. Fortune's look of guileless innocence showed that she had no idea of what was pending. She had grown accustomed to having others do most of her thinking and planning.

"Can't you recall anybody that was here yesterday?" began Marje, so conscientiously that her question sounded rather imperative.

"Nobody but Gath Singleton, and I'm sure he wouldn't take them," said Mrs. Fortune with a show of indignation.

"I don't mean to seem suspicious — but I didn't like the looks of that maid you had — Cora," stammered Marje.

"Oh, I wonder if it could be she?" Mrs. Fortune seemed convinced that her niece was on the right track.

"What was her full name, and who recommended her?"

The aunt racked her brain for some time before saying helplessly: "Indeed, I don't know her last name nor where she came from. I didn't get her from an Agency. She said she was recommended by a lady I knew in Hyde Park —"

"What was the lady's name?"

"Indeed, I couldn't place the woman; I thought perhaps she might have been some one I had met at a club or an afternoon tea. So many people know me — and I'm interested in so few, I never try to remember names. When that Cora came and offered to hire out, I fairly nabbed her. I put her right in the kitchen and told her to work out her salvation as best she could. But I can't think the thief was Cora. If it had been she, I'm sure she would have gotten away before I returned from the station."

"She possibly wanted to get a good haul," said Marje with the wisdom of a very highly experienced woman. "Possibly she needed summer furs and the jewelry you wore. Did she act suspicious when she left?"

"Come to think of it — she did. She ran down the back way as soon as she got her pay for the

day, though I shouldn't have given her a cent till she had prepared dinner for us. I'll never hire another person by the day. I noticed that the little grip she carried was rather bulging in appearance, and I wondered at the time why she took a grip along with her; people don't usually do that when they're hired by the day. But I'm not suspicious; I never dreamt of such a nice-looking girl as Cora doing such an outrageous thing, though I was angry with her when she told me she wasn't coming back."

"I should think you'd have to be very cautious — in a great city like Chicago," said Marje.

"But she had such honest eyes; they seemed to look into one's very soul. No one would have doubted her."

"Possibly," agreed Marje, despite the fact that she tossed her head unbelievingly. "I've seen such eyes before, and they're sometimes not averse to looking into people's bedrooms for things to steal. As for me, I didn't like her eyes. They were not shifting eyes, but the brazen kind that takes you in at one glance — the kind that stares impudently at you, as if they wonder how old you are, and what your bank account is, and if it will be easy to get around you."

"Well, what are we going to do about it?"

Marje continued, after a moment of complete silence.

"Simply let it go, and forget about it," replied the other. "I'd be ashamed to let anybody know I had been taken in so easily. I'd rather lose the ring and all — much as it breaks my heart. It's a dear lesson, but I've learned it."

She laughed rather gamely as she rose to close the drawers of the chiffonier.

"If I were in your place, I know what I'd do," said Marje, her feeling of shock quite over-ridden by her growing indignation against the mysterious Cora; "I'd call up Ned, and we'd get together and talk it over. I'd tell him all the circumstances, and we'd soon decide what would be the best step to take to recover the lost property. Two good opinions are better than one, at such a time."

"But Ned would laugh and keep reminding you that you were very green to be taken in that way."

"Perhaps he would," admitted Marje. "Sometimes brothers can make it very uncomfortable for a person — perhaps say a great many things they shouldn't — but I've found it best to share the confidence of my brothers. We always hold consultations."

"But we can't in this case," protested Mrs. For-

tune. "I don't want Ned to know it; he might think me incompetent to manage his brothers and sisters, though all I have done is to let them manage me. And I don't want the little ones to know. Promise me, Marje, you'll not give away our secret to Jean or Rex."

Marje promised, very much against her will. She saw the sincerity pervading her aunt's point of view, though she had firm convictions of her own.

"And Marje, I want you to forget it, too, for the present," pleaded her aunt, looking so pathetic yet so pretty that Marje gave her an impulsive embrace. "This afternoon I was going to take you out in my motor-car to see some of the sights; but Gath will do just as well. I'd much rather stay at home."

"But I'm going to stay with you, Aunt Esther," declared the girl. "Do you think I'd desert you after you've had such a calamity? And I'm sure Jean won't go without me. So you and I can rummage here all afternoon, for those furs and things; and I'll not breathe a word of it to Jean."

"That's a dear; I'll make it up to you in some way." And with the lightness of a child, Mrs. Fortune dismissed the topic. With her arm about

Marje's waist, she returned to the kitchen, and was soon carrying on a sprightly conversation with Jean. As for Marje, she grew reconciled to the situation, so far as the present was concerned. There was no advantage to be gained by spoiling the pleasure of Jean and Rex, even for one short moment; but she would watch and wait for an opportunity to get the thief.

So it happened that a party of young gentlemen occupied Mrs. Fortune's motor-car late that afternoon, while the girls stayed at home — Jean wondering why her poor aunt had such a racking headache, and why Marje spent her time in Aunt Esther's hot bedroom, with the door shut.

As this volume is not intended as a guide-book for boys and girls, but simply to show how an American family, bound together by common interests and great affection, conducted themselves during a visit to Chicago, it will be impossible to mention all the wonderful things the Merrymaker boys, with Jack Gore and Gath Singleton, saw before returning to the handsome apartment of Mrs. Fortune in Grand Boulevard. Indeed, they kept their chauffeur busily employed for several hours; for they begged to be taken through the chain of

superb boulevards and parks that adorn the North, West, and South Sides, thereby learning by their own experience that Gath Singleton had not been too loud in his praises of The Garden City.

It was in the evening that they enjoyed themselves most; for they dined, to the strains of an Italian band, in a lovely garden with unusually cooling breezes. The tables and chairs were painted green — as green as the rolling lawn all about them; and the murmur of a great fountain lent zest to the notes of sweet-toned flutes and clarinets.

"I wish we had a green table at home," said Rex, who was seated in a high-chair. He was eating very early green-corn from a cob, with such voracity Ned could hardly bear to look at him; for Rex had a unique way of working his mouth along the cob as if he were playing a French-harp, and there were kernels of corn and the grease of butter high on his cheeks and clinging to his ears.

"Why do you want a green table?" asked Gath Singleton, much amused at Rex's picnic deportment.

"'Cause we wouldn't have to have a table-cloth, and nobody would scold you for makin' spots," replied Rex, but not till he had reached the end of his enjoyable pastime.

"I'm thankful Bess isn't here to see you eat," said Ned. "You act like a starved little savage. Take that napkin and wipe off your countenance."

"Bess never cares when we are out on a picnic," assured the younger brother, making sure that the cob was of no further value to him.

"Do you have many picnics?" inquired Gath.

"They seem to have them most of the time in summer," informed Ned, at the same time smiling at Rex's bold onslaught upon an ample piece of peach pie. "They have them in the woods when it's hot, and at home when it rains."

"But we're not going to have so many in the future," said Carl rather ruefully. "You see, I'm working during my leisure hours now, and Bess belongs to so many literary societies, and Marje has to practice on the piano four hours a day; I suppose by next summer Rex and Jean will be having their picnics alone."

Gath laughed. He thought the Merrymakers very odd and simple in their customs and philosophies. Yet the old-fashioned sort of family amusements did not appeal to him; he loved the great city with its modern conveniences and luxuries, and at sixteen was making himself congenial with his father's amusements. But notwithstanding that he

was inclined to make light of the simplicity pervading these thoroughly human youngsters, he was pleased with their lack of affectation and their disposition to make the best of any event that should come their way.

"Rex," admonished Carl rather sharply, "you'll get crumbs all over yourself. Always hang your face over the table when you eat pie."

The others laughed uproariously at this candid but questionable bit of advice; especially Gath, who had noted with increasing amusement that most of Rex's repast seemed bent upon evading his mouth. Though Rex somewhat resented this unnecessary infringement upon his liberty, he obeyed Carl's instructions and found them much to his advantage.

After dinner, the boys took a trolley-car and rode to Sans Souci. There the subdued lights tucked away in the foliage of the trees, the various places of amusement, and several bands playing their most festive airs, charmed them for another hour. But Gath, who was never contented to stay long in one place and was always on the search for something novel, insisted that they go to the White City.

And surely this was the whitest city the Merrymakers had ever seen; unlike the down-town part

of Chicago with its clouds of coal-dust monopolizing the pure air and plunging into mourning its many wonderful pieces of architecture that otherwise would have been the delight of the floating population!

First they passed through an avenue of shops and open air refectories. Fakirs were selling their wares or inviting the pleasure-seeking public to indulge in games of chance. There were shooting-galleries and side-shows heralded by extravagant pictures in gay colors. There was a long roller-coaster that leapt over hills and vales to a dim peak in the distance. No wonder the passengers of this flying caterpillar shrieked and bellowed in mingled fear and exhilaration, considering the unprecedented thrill they were experiencing for only a dime apiece! There was also a queer contrivance into whose round compartments passengers were packed, like pickles in a jar, and bounced about on a rough surface supposed to resemble in its movements the waves of an angry ocean. Though Ned tried this sport, to please the others of the party, he could not comprehend why people should be willing to pay for being bumped till their bones ached and their teeth chattered; howbeit, Rex insisted that it was very beneficial, especially after one had eaten

a hearty meal. In another place they saw human beings hurled one by one through a big funnel and out upon a canvas stretcher; some of them lighted most ungracefully, yet they brazenly shrieked their satisfaction and kept on spending their money to repeat this grotesque performance, notwithstanding that they might have considered it a great hardship to be slightly jolted while hanging to street-car straps.

At the base of the great white tower, which was studded with hundreds of brilliant lights, was a vast stage facing a pool of silvery water. Scores of girls in filmy dresses of pink, blue, or white, were dancing to the strains of an immense band-orchestra. But how could any one follow the theme of the most powerful musical selection ever composed when so many exciting things kept happening all the time? Indeed, Rex yelled at the top of his voice when a girl in the distance mounted a ladder fifty feet high and plunged into a tank of water. But before he could be convinced that the girl's neck had not been broken, a man in a monoplane buzzed over their heads; and, from all sides of the artificial lake, bushy-haired girls and museum freaks of every description came out upon their respective platforms to be exploited by their shrill-voiced managers. It

seemed that every time the dancing singers on the stage reached a thrilling note that warranted the undivided attention of their audience, some one in that vast area of amusements would spoil the effect by shouting "Hot tamales!" "Peanuts!" "Nice fresh popcorn!" or some event of a startling nature would elicit vociferous hurrahs and roars of laughter.

"I like a lively place," shouted Gath from the far end of their long settee. "I don't want anything slow; real life is poky enough."

Rex enthusiastically agreed with him, but Carl had nothing to say. He considered all these distractions very suitable for people who led humdrum lives, or for nervous folk managing to keep normal by subjecting themselves to a continuous siege of excitement; but, so far as he was concerned, he preferred a game of baseball in the scorching sun, or a rainy evening at home where wit and humor were all the funnier for the reason that they were unpremeditated.

Then they continued their quest through this panorama of wonders, and agreed with Gath that the White City was worth the price of admission and much more. But nothing proved so amusing to Rex as the stall at which several men were pay-

ing a nickel apiece in order to throw a ball at a colored boy's head poked through a hole in a square of soiled canvas. It was comical to see this black creature roll his eyes, twitch his heavy lips, and dare his assailants to do their worst, though Rex noted that he was very eager to duck his curly pate whenever a ball came uncomfortably close.

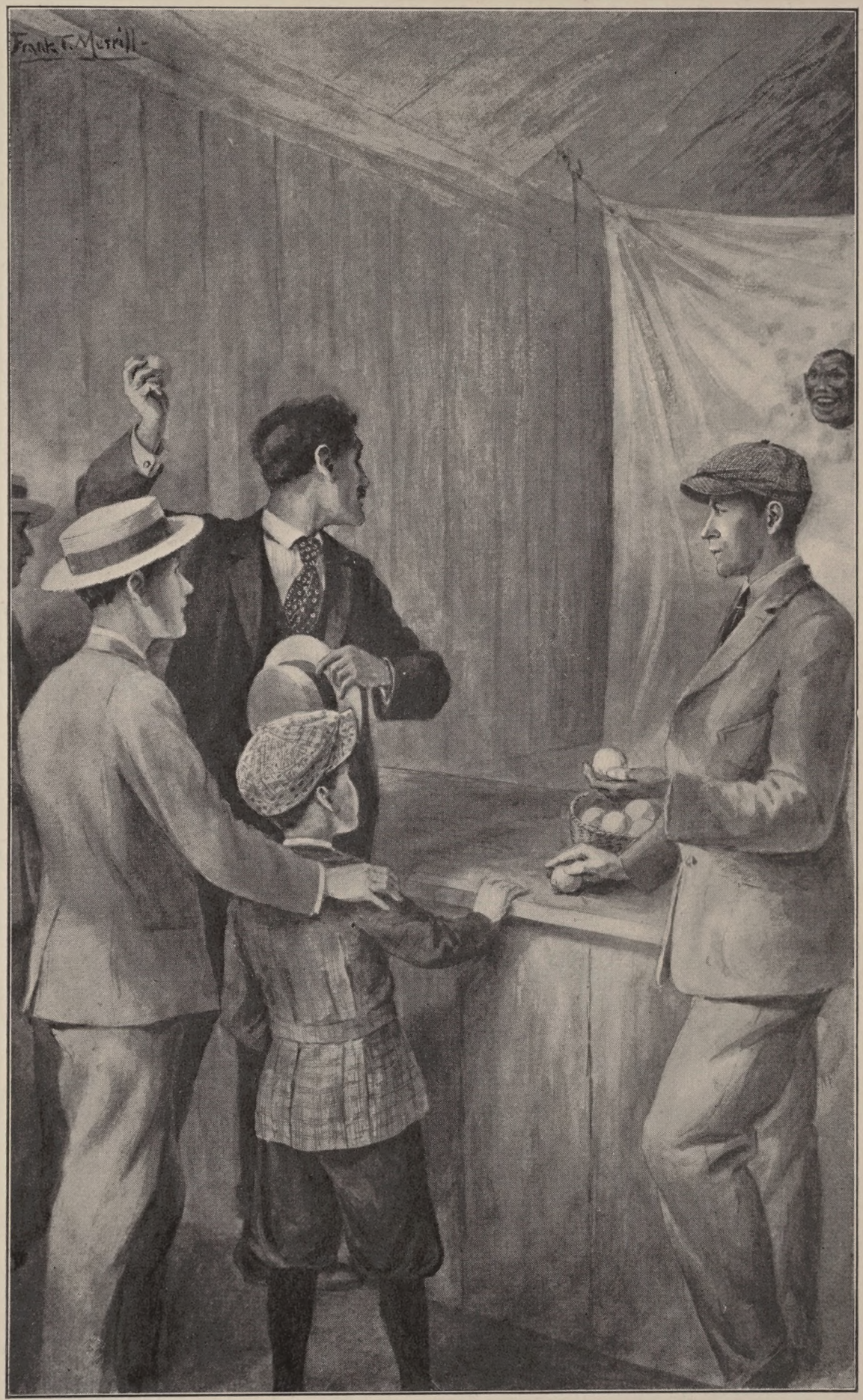
"I never saw anything so funny," laughed Rex, so boisterously that Ned grew somewhat worried about the moral conduct of his youngest charge. He wondered why a pastime so sordid should make such a strong appeal to a Merrymaker.

"Why do you laugh, Rex?" he asked anxiously. "What fun would there be in firing a ball at the head of that poor colored boy?"

"Oh, I wish somebody would hit him!" cried Rex, unconscious of Ned's paternal solicitude. "It would serve him right. He makes such ugly faces and dares everybody to hit him — and when they miss, he gives 'em the laugh."

"I think the law should prevent such spectacles," said Ned disapprovingly, though he gazed with the same sort of fascination that seemed to be consuming Rex. "Suppose somebody should put his eye out?"

"He gets paid for it," said Gath indifferently,



"HE GAZED WITH THE SAME SORT OF FASCINATION THAT SEEMED TO BE CONSUMING REX"

"and he's willing to run the risk — so why worry about it? Besides, nobody ever hits him; he's too good a ducker. And it's likely that his skull is so thick, a person couldn't dent it with a sledge-hammer; it's possibly as solid as the dome over St. Peter's."

But Gath's attempted justification of that questionable amusement was cut short by another penetrating shriek from Rex, caused by the sight of the wooly head disappearing just as a ball crashed against the canvas within an inch of it; surely, it was a close call. And, to make it all the more absorbing to onlookers, the colored boy immediately stuck his face through the hole again and shouted impudently: "Poor shot — you couldn't hit a barn! I'm not going to move next time; try it once more if you dare!"

"Come on, let's find something a little more edifying," suggested Ned as he led the reluctant Rex away.

"Yes; suppose we try a shooting-gallery, and fire at the paper geese and rabbits," advocated Carl.

But before this advice could be followed out, Ned found himself being dragged into a merry-go-round that revolved to the catchy airs proceeding from a white organ encrusted with gilt mermaids and

cupids. Though he positively insisted that they all sit in a red chariot upon which were carved the images of ludicrous hobgoblins and fat babies with wide-open mouths, Gath Singleton and Rex soon began to satisfy their craving for sensationalism by mounting a pair of white ostriches, while Jack Gore and Carl seated themselves upon a pair of gray nags that moved up and down with comical precision. Ned — good-natured lad that he was — even consented to several more of these thrilling rides, despite the fact that the insufferable weather and the Convention had combined to make him dizzy enough, without his trying mechanical devices of the merry-go-round variety. Furthermore, he ate a Frankfurter sausage with the rest, just two minutes after their ride had ceased, and topped it off with hot peanuts and a glass of orangeade.

"I'm afraid Aunt Esther and Marje will find it hard to control Rex to-morrow, after such a wild night," he laughingly remarked from his corner of the bench by the artificial lake, where they had returned to watch the ascension of an illuminated balloon. Then he discovered that he had been talking to himself; for his companions had all deserted him and were swallowed up by the throng. He did not worry, however; he knew that Rex was at least

sure of protection when escorted by Jack Gore, though he realized that Jack Gore had little regard for decorum when there was a romp in sight. Ten minutes later he beheld Gath and Carl, with Rex between them, coming rapidly towards him; Rex carried a flat object in both chubby hands, and he and all his companions were laughing boisterously.

"Where have you been?" was Ned's natural query.

"We weren't lost," assured Gath, suddenly controlling himself to match Ned's rather elderly dignity; "you can't lose a Chicagoan in Chicago. You see, Rex was determined to take a chance —"

"A chance at what?" quizzed Ned, affecting seriousness as he gazed at the youngest of the Merrymakers. "What has he been doing now? He's made me do all sorts of outrageous things this evening — bump the billows, ride on a merry-go-round, and slip through a funnel — yet the little rascal wasn't satisfied."

"He was bound to go back and have a shot at that colored fellow stickin' his head through a hole in a blanket," explained Carl.

"Yes — Jack Gore held me up, so I could aim straight," said Rex with frantic enthusiasm.

"I didn't want him to do it, but he had his head

set," apologized Carl, touched by Ned's look of consternation. "But he won a prize — a pretty Japanese pin-tray for Aunt Esther."

"Sure I did, Ned," clamored Rex, holding up the precious bit of bric-a-brac, which upon close inspection did not seem entirely appropriate as a gift for a lady of Mrs. Fortune's fastidious tastes — though to this day she still keeps it stored away in a china-cabinet, with her Cloisonné collection. "It only cost a nickel a chance — and I borrowed the money of Jack Gore. But, all the same, I hit that colored kid — ker-plunk! — right on the bean!"

CHAPTER III

CARL HELPS NED

INTENSE commotion was prevailing at the Coliseum. The Speaker of the Convention — a small man with a scraggy beard and the eye of a kingfisher — was standing pigeon-toed on the high platform and pounding the table with a wooden mallet till it seemed that both the table and the mallet would fly into splinters. But the more the little speaker pounded and perspired, the more deafening grew the cries and buzzings of that vast multitude. Indeed Carl, who had come down to visit Jack Gore and Ned, was almost overcome by these strenuous manifestations. Hitherto he had supposed that Senators, Congressmen, and Representatives were always placid and dignified in public; but to his amazement he found them engaging in antics common to bleachers at a ball-game. He beheld circling rows of notable men from every state in the Union; they seemed to have been assorted and placed in sections like so many prize pigs about to be marketed in choice places — each section desig-

nated by a huge placard flaring its specific number in big black figures.

A delegate from Honolulu had just ascended the platform and was preparing to overcome the confusion with the sheer weight of his eloquence; several other delegates, who had bobbed up like mushrooms after a warm rain, in order to get recognition from the Speaker, seemed to wither and fall back into their cramped places. The delegate from Honolulu seemed thirsty, for he drank two glasses of ice-water before mopping his brow, separated his wilted collar from his Adam's-apple, and almost lifted the beamed ceiling with his thunderous bass voice. Notwithstanding that the orator kept alluding to his surprise at being called upon to speak a word for his cause, Carl knew very well that no human being could give vent to such an ornate address without having spent many months in its preparation.

Stirred by the excitement, the overwhelming display of flags, and the ocean of bobbing heads — most of them bald and intelligent-looking — the boy slowly made his way down to the row of desks between the platform and the Nebraska section. There he found the reporters scribbling away on pads and loose sheets of paper; while office and

messenger boys kept in lively circulation among them as they skeltered to and fro, most of them seeking the precious "copy" demanded by every newspaper in the nation. Both Jack Gore and Ned were working as though they had but a few seconds more in which to make out their last wills and testaments — Ned with a grave face, but Jack Gore smiling as if the Honolulu address were a very comical monologue instead of a serious burst of oratory. For ten minutes Carl stood in the shadow of the Nebraska banner; he knew that it was a punishable crime to interrupt reporters when they were on the "dead line," as Ned termed it. Glad he was when an intermission was called, and Ned motioned him to approach his desk.

"Hello, Carl," was Ned's cordial greeting. "I'm pleased that you accepted my invitation to come down and see the Big Convention. Jack Gore is here. He is waiting for a word with you."

Carl eagerly advanced. "Well, well, well — how's the boy?" Jack burst forth, in imitation of his delightful boarding-house mistress, Mrs. O'Brien. "I take great pleasure in welcoming you to Chicago, though nobody did that much for me. You see, there are too many other national celebrities

here; it's no wonder I feel as covered-up as the tiny potato in the bottom of a grocer's measure. Hope you're well. How are Marje and Jean and the little shaver to-day?"

"Very well, thanks," replied Carl, rather embarrassed by Jack's loud and effusive greeting, which seemed to set most of the Nebraska section to staring at them. "Aunt Esther wants you to come out to dinner to-night; she's eager to meet you."

"Three cheers and a tiger for your Aunt Esther!" returned Jack Gore, making the most of the intermission by sitting down on one of the low desks and swinging his legs. "It sounds good to me. I'm very restless for some evidence of home, even if it's nothing more than a fried egg on a plate and a cat under the table. But how are you spending your time?"

"Just visiting," said Carl, looking somewhat shame-faced. "Ned asked me to come down to the Convention — so I did. A friend named Gath Singleton — the one you met last night — came along with me; he's out at the side entrance talking to some one in an automobile. I hope you can give me a job; I hate to see you and Ned working so hard, while I do nothing but kill time."

"There doesn't seem to be anything an untrained

boy can do," put in Ned as he leaned back in his chair and directed a tired smile at his brother. "Jack and I have been right at the bat ever since this affair opened. If it hadn't been for these intermissions, I'm sure we'd have died long ago. So much to do — and such heat and noise!"

"You're always reminding me that I'm only a boy," said Carl with some asperity. "But you must at least admit that I'm rather a big boy; and I'm at the age when I want to sound out the various occupations and find what I'm fitted for in life. I think you might give me something to do, just for experience — something that will be a help to you."

"Sure, we will," cried Jack Gore, as usual sympathetic with Carl's projects; "you can get right at it. Say, Ned, why can't we send the kid out to corner those dark horses? It will save us a heap of work, and it can't do any harm. Besides, it's right that we should give the boy a chance."

"Impossible," laughed Ned. But as Jack Gore was always ready to try innovations, he closed his ears to Ned's derisive refusal and approached Carl in confidential fashion. Carl hoped that Jack was not going to spring a joke — possibly tell him to go and chase himself.

"Say, Carl," began Jack, laying an impressive

hand upon the boy's arm; "I think you're just the lad we can use. We're trying to get interviews with three very important men of the Convention: Senator A—— of Connecticut, Congressman G—— of Ohio, and Senator V—— of Iowa. They're very important but very modest and retiring by nature, as all great men are, barring politicians that have to do their own hustling. They seem to be working in the dark, and they don't want any newspaper notoriety. I haven't the slightest idea where you'll find them — so don't ask me. Reporters have to do their own nosing for news, or they won't get any. Run on now, and get them to talking. Bring us a nice little interview from each of them, but keep as cool as you can. We'll be here till five to-night, perhaps later."

Ned attempted to interfere. "Jack," he said, "you might just as well tell the boy to go out and pump the lake dry, or purify the canal. The idea of your sending out a green boy on such an assignment — to corner and interview three of the slipperiest men of the Convention! Don't pay any attention to him, Carl. Just go out with Singleton and have a good time. Jack and I are used to burrowing through these conventions without help. Thanks, just the same."

"You mind me, Carl — not Ned," spoke Jack with authority. "Here's a pad and a stub of a pencil. Now's your opportunity to find out whether you're a bright boy or a boob. Interview the Connecticut senator first. I shouldn't be surprised if you'd find all three of them together — simply for the reason that they're always fighting one another through the newspapers. Senator V—— of Iowa is a fighter; he's likely to turn you wrong-side-out, then call for the police before you can pull yourself together again. So you must speak to him as though he were an angel in kid gloves."

Carl thrust the pad and pencil into his pocket. Now that he had received an assignment, he was uncertain as to how he should proceed; yet he was determined to ask no questions.

Jack, evidently reading the mind of his new recruit with that accuracy characterizing men of his profession, rattled on with increasing assurance: "I know you'll get something for your trouble — and it will be a great help to Ned. Don't bother because you don't know the run of the Convention or anything about politics. If you're bright enough to corner them, they'll tell you everything you ought to know — and more, too. Your greatest task will be to head them off when once they

get started to talk. I hope you'll pull out a few plums worth while —"

"But Jack," protested Ned, "I don't want my young brother running around to hotels —"

"What's the difference, so long as he doesn't stop long enough to loaf?" came back Jack with playful roughness. "Can't you give him a chance to use his judgment? Surely you want your brother to show his gumption, don't you? Or do you want him to be a dodder-head — no earthly good except to put away three squares a day and sleep like a horse at night?"

Ned shrugged his shoulders. What was the use of trying to reason with such an irresponsible creature as his dearest chum, Jack Gore? He had nothing to say when Jack went on in his breezy way: "Besides, Carl is more cautious than you. And if he fails to drag forth these three distinguished gentlemen, we'll forgive him, and he'll have the benefit of the experience and all the exercise a man needs for one day. You forget that you were as green as Carl when you started in. Don't you remember how you made a laughing-stock of yourself when the newspaper sent you out to interview a man named John Smith — a man accused of selling meat under weight? It surely was a scream when

you tackled the wrong John Smith — a minister of the gospel — and got put out of the house; and the way you absent-mindedly trotted off with his umbrella, and was afraid to take it back."

Because of its veracity Ned did not fly into a temper at this indelicate reminder. Like the other Merrymakers he was square enough to enjoy a good joke at his own expense; so, before he knew it, he agreed that Jack should give Carl his desired opportunity. No other words were spoken; for at that moment the Speaker was again mauling the table with his great wooden mallet, and Carl was hurrying out of the building, while the brass band was slowly convalescing from its recent stentorian attack upon "Hail, Columbia!" Ned smiled grimly as he noted all the havoc wrought by heat and excitement in that vast arena of human beings; he decided that it was no more than fair that Carl should share these discomforts in his willing pursuit of experience.

Nobody seemed to realize that Carl had just been appointed an assistant correspondent for a leading New York newspaper; in truth, not a solitary person seemed interested in anybody else at that tense meeting. Consequently, Carl believed that he had a clear field to himself in which to test

his ability as an interviewer — just as he had, that time in New York, when he tried out the detective game and found it extremely distasteful. Chicago was a big place — a broad place; evidently, people did not care what others were doing, so long as they kept from colliding with the general welfare. He found Gath Singleton waiting at the entrance.

"I've got a job," announced Carl with great confidence.

"What kind of a job — any money in it?" questioned Gath.

"Not a cent. I'm going to help Jack Gore and Ned. They're swamped with this Convention — poor fellows! — and they want me to hunt up a few celebrities and interview them. I expect to get some of the biggest fish of this Convention to talking."

Carl had no time to revise his mixed metaphor; so he kept a straight face and hurried on, despite Gath's disposition to lag behind and roar at such an incongruity as talking fish. For Carl was in earnest — so much so that he refused to stop at a drug-store for a milk-shake. Soon they had wended their way to Michigan Boulevard — a thoroughfare exceedingly beautiful, notwithstanding that twelve

hundred locomotives encrust it with grime each day, and the mighty Lake Michigan at its side constantly moans and endeavors to get at it and cleanse it from foundation to topmost pinnacle.

The two lads walked with the vigor and briskness of typical Chicagoans; for Carl, too, had grown more brisk and alert since discovering that it is no less than a crime to poke about the Windy City after the leisurely manner that seems to possess most of the people in less strenuous towns — people who have plenty of leisure but no style. And as they progressed, they spent their time in discussing the three celebrities Carl was to interview — especially the cross one from Iowa. Their young faces were illumined with new interest; for both boys were full of vim, and Life seemed to be stretching out before them the glittering mantle of their future, like the silver-blue lake confronting the grimy but beautiful Boulevard. Gath was taller, also smarter in dress than Carl; then too, he was somewhat handsomer. But, on the other hand, Carl did not suffer by comparison with Gath; he was one of those young Americans compelled to work out his own destiny — one who dares not fail to regard the welfare of his devoted family as his first consideration. Consequently, his eyes seemed brighter with the zeal

that opens the way to fitting opportunities, and his face was flushed with the glow of happy expectation.

"I have a suggestion to make," said Gath as they neared the Auditorium, a building of such massive proportions and unquestionable dignity that Carl gazed at it in reverence: "I'll help you with your work. But how on earth shall we set about it? Where are your three celebrities staying?"

"I haven't the least idea," replied Carl, looking nonplussed. "And if I had asked Jack, he'd have told me that I'd never make a good reporter if I stopped to ask questions. All I have to work on is just the clue that those three men are somewhere in Chicago. I'm going to let my common sense guide me — that is, if I have any. I'm glad you're going to help me; but we mustn't be working at cross purposes. It seems to me that the first thing to do is for us to go to Republican Headquarters in the Congress Hotel. That's where I started for."

"Good idea," acceded Gath. "You'd better run down the Connecticut man, while I try to get a clue to the one from Ohio. I don't care to interview that fierce one from Iowa. You see, I live in Chicago, and I don't want to have anything sensational happen to me — especially while my folks are away from home."

Carl consented to this plan, and both plucky boys began their separate pursuits, after agreeing to meet late that afternoon in the lobby of the Congress Hotel.

It must be admitted that Carl's heart fluttered when he had gone up in one of the Congress elevators and was beginning investigations in the great rooms used as the headquarters of the Convention. This suite was occupied largely by well-dressed men walking about or visiting in little groups. All of them seemed to be on their good behavior; they were excessively polite to one another and shook hands frequently. Several clerks were writing or answering questions at desks and tables; there was a frantic rapping of telegraph instruments, also an industrious clicking of typewriters, while two fat men could be seen talking and perspiring freely in telephone booths. Over all hung the Stars and Stripes and several yards of twisted bunting.

Carl learned at the information desk that the Connecticut Senator was not on record; in fact, the clerk — a young woman with an inflated coil of auburn hair — was not sure that Connecticut had a Senator. But Carl had learned from Ned that the main essentials in reporting are to find a clue, and never to get discouraged at the rebuffs hiding

the clue from sight; so he set out upon a desultory search for Senator A—— gaining strength and courage with each failure to find his whereabouts. For a half-hour he hunted headquarters, the hotel lobby, the writing-rooms, and even the ladies' parlor; he also made scores of inquiries in the tunnel leading to the Auditorium, and trailed through luxurious Peacock Alley, with its wonderful fountain and walls of Pompeiian-red. In short, he asked every man of respectable appearance if he had seen Senator A——. He was about to return to the Coliseum, that he might inquire of the delegates in the Connecticut section, when he suddenly found himself quizzing a near-sighted politician reading a newspaper in the Congress lobby.

"Why do you want Senator A——?" demanded the man rather irritably as he squinted over the top of his paper.

Carl, already too weary to explain his business on such short acquaintance, replied guardedly but truthfully: "I have a message for him."

"You look as if you'd been chasing a lightning-bolt," remarked the politician, suddenly grown sympathetic after removing his spectacles to get a clearer view of the flame-cheeked lad before him.

"I suppose I do look hot and mussed up," laughed

Carl. "Did you ever see such weather? I've hunted Senator A—— till I don't believe such a man exists. Surely he isn't much good, or somebody would happen to know him."

"But you're on the right track now," encouraged the politician. "Senator A—— is one of the big men of the Convention; but he's doing his best work in private. He's pulling the wires to help somebody else, so there's no reason why he should appear before the public. What does he care for the public now? Nobody knows where he is except a few men in his ring; he stays in and drinks iced-tea and furnishes the brains, and the others run around in the heat and furnish the legs. I'm not very fond of Senator A——; he's against all the policies I stand for. But he has power, and he knows how to pull his wires. But that's no reason why a boy like you should half kill himself of fatigue trying to locate him — particularly on a hot day — it's a shame! Some of you messenger boys have a hard time of it. Now I happen to know that Senator A—— is in this very hotel — Room 411. I had a hard time finding it out — so don't you tell."

"But the clerk says he isn't here," argued Carl, knowing that clues are often misleading.

"He had to say that," declared the man, with a knowing wink. "Senator A—— refuses to be seen by anybody outside of his little gang. He's up in his room this minute, making plans to stir the Convention inside out. Go right up and give him your message."

Carl thanked the near-sighted politician and hastened back to the hotel office where the clerks were experiencing the busiest hours of their lives. How should he approach the elusory Senator from Connecticut? He finally decided that he would send up his card. Then he grew dubious; for, although his name looked rather distinguished, it might excite the suspicion of a great man trying to hide from the public. He wrote his name on a neat bit of card-board, nevertheless, and handed it to one of the clerks, all the time trying to look elderly and important.

"The Senator is very busy," said the clerk, obviously surprised that the boy should know the exact number of that celebrity's room. "Perhaps you'd better be a little more to the point. Give him some idea what you want of him; otherwise, he'll send down word that he isn't at home."

Carl took back the card and wrote in a flourishing hand that spelled pride with every curve:

"New York Newspaper Reporter." Then he said with such dignity that the clerk bowed respectfully: "I guess that will give the Senator an inkling as to what I want. If you'll kindly send it up by a boy, I'll wait over there in that big room — on that green-plush settee; I can't possibly stand up a minute longer."

The clerk rang for a bell-boy and Carl strolled into the inner lobby, at that hour the most colorful place any boy could imagine. He wondered why the exterior of Chicago had to be so black and grimy, while within its spacious buildings everything was so clean and bright, so restful and luxurious. The fore part of this lobby was monopolized by women in beautiful gowns. Evidently they were the wives and daughters of prominent Conventioners; they were gossiping together in little groups, but not so busily as the politicians at headquarters upstairs. Some of them were seated on velvet chairs and divans; most of them were carrying lorgnettes, flowers, or boxes of bonbons; a few were parading about the room and occasionally looking into mirrors to see if their hats were on straight. Carl wished that his sisters were with him, to see those marvelous gowns and hear the music wafted from an adjoining apart-

ment by a dozen or more electric fans. He also made the discovery that people from all parts of the United States look very much the same when they are dressed for an occasion; for, by listening to the conversation, he learned the names of the more noticeable ladies and the states from which they hailed. It seemed to him that the prettiest one came from Vermont, the most cultivated one from Montana, and the best-dressed one from Kansas.

There he sat on the comfortable green couch taking a fresh interest in life as he awaited the invitation to meet the distinguished senator from Connecticut. All the chairs in his vicinity were occupied by men who were gazing admiringly at the women in the foreground. But while he was getting a newspaper reporter's mead of rest and thrills, a very pretty young woman, with flowers bobbing up and down on her wide-brimmed hat, took a seat beside him. She was evidently a lady accustomed to minding her own business — just like Bess. In fact, like all the girls of the Merrymaker family, she must have been brought up with boys, and had grown so much accustomed to them that she did not consider it any honor when men with bad manners persisted in staring at her. She

"'THERE, TEDDY — SNAP HER!'"

was a free American citizen and felt her right to be in public. No man could gaze her out of countenance — just because she happened to be pretty and was wearing a very becoming hat and high heels. She was not thinking of anybody except a woman at whom she was gazing intently — a stout woman leaning against a pillar while she talked at the top of her speed with an old friend; she was also busily plying that kind of fan that refuses to stir the atmosphere, yet looks pretty when in motion.

"There, Teddy — snap her!" cried the young lady at his side. "Better snap her twice; some of the films are no good."

Carl then saw a boy younger than himself taking pictures of the woman standing by the pillar and talking at the top of her speed; she seemed serenely unconscious that she was being photographed. No wonder the girl at his side laughed, in such a way as to show her dimples and an array of white and regular teeth.

"I've been trying an hour to get that woman's picture," she said, as familiarly as if Carl had always been one of her warmest friends. "But it's been a terrible task; she's so active my caddy couldn't get at her. She's as restless as the chicken

that ran about so much the farmer couldn't count it."

"I hope I got at least one good snap," said the little boy with the camera. "I'm afraid there wasn't light enough, and she wouldn't hold her mouth still. And her big hat will make her face look black — and she was standing pigeon-toed a little."

"Serves her right," rippled the girl. "When she sees herself in our newspaper to-night, she'll be as put-out as a parrot in a rain-storm. And what will her husband say when he sees it — and all the people back in her home village?"

"Why did you want her picture?" asked Carl, his curiosity overleaping restraint.

The girl looked leniently at him. Plainly, she was not averse to being asked questions.

"I'm a newspaper woman," she said. "Doubtless, you've heard of me. Almost everybody has. I write under the name of Ethel Caldwell."

"Ethel Caldwell!" cried Carl, thrilled with delight at being self-introduced to such a celebrity. "I read your column every evening — it's splendid — and so funny! Your picture always heads the column — and you look so stunning in full dress."

"Yes, my picture is published every day," admitted Miss Caldwell with an amused laugh. "You know, we are living in that newspaper era when the public likes to look at pictures of women — especially if they are young and good-looking. Most of the best newspaper women are getting along in years, so the newspapers print their old photographs — taken from ten to twenty years ago."

"Indeed!" Carl felt that he was learning another trick of the trade from one of its ablest masters.

"And every day we are looking for the pictures of good-looking women to illustrate our newspaper stories," went on Miss Caldwell. "So long as women are the vainest creatures in the world, so long will newspapers continue to publish their pictures. But most of the men are just as anxious to see their likenesses in the papers — only the public isn't so much interested in them. Men look too much alike. They have the same set expression of countenance in pictures, the same stolid dignity, the same kind of clothes. They're as much alike as the straw hats they wear."

Carl was not sufficiently experienced to attempt an argument with such a well-posted young woman, so he remained silent and continued gazing at her

intently. He wished, however, that Jack Gore were present to prolong the animated conversation. The results would be more comical than anything one could possibly hear over the foot-lights.

"I tried my best to get her to loan me her photograph this morning," continued Miss Caldwell, pointing at the woman who had just been snapped. "You know, of course, that it's the custom for the wives of celebrated men to carry their photographs around with them to conventions or wherever they go. In fact, a great many of these women would pay a good price to get their pictures published. But that woman — the wife of a New York Congressman — actually abused me when I asked for her photograph. She said she would rather die than see her face in the paper — and I don't blame her; she'll never take a prize at a beauty contest. So I've followed her around till I'm almost exhausted; I've wasted hours trying to get a good snap-shot. When I finally caught her in the most ungraceful position a woman could hold in public, I had my caddy snap her. There'll be a nice surprise for her when the evening edition is out."

Miss Caldwell, with a sigh of satisfaction, busied herself in tucking some loose papers into a portfolio already congested with photographs of ladies in

full dress. "It always pays," she added, "never to refuse your photograph to any newspaper that asks you for it. If you do, they'll have you hounded and snap-shotted — and you're likely to die from the shock."

At that moment a colored bell-boy approached Carl; he was bearing a silver tray containing a card. "The gentleman is not seeing reporters," he announced as he hastily withdrew, leaving Carl holding the card he had sent up to Senator A——.

Miss Caldwell glanced at the card. "Pardon me — but are you a young reporter?" she asked, suddenly growing more interested in him.

"I'm helping my brother a little — that is, I'm trying to. He's reporting the Convention for a New York newspaper. He sent me over to interview Senator A—— from Connecticut."

"Oh, I see — you're new at the business." The young lady looked at him kindly, though amused. "You'll learn to use your wit some day. Everybody knows that Senator A— wouldn't see the greatest reporter in the world — not even Irvin Cobb. Why were you so stupid as to let him know that you are a reporter?"

"The clerk told me to explain my business," said Carl helplessly.

"I dare say you frightened the poor senator out of the last ten years of his life," chuckled Miss Caldwell. "He's probably hiding under his bed. He's one of the few men that doesn't want to be interviewed."

Carl gazed appealingly at the speaker. "But how else could I have worked it?" he inquired.

"Whenever you are in doubt as to how a notable is going to act about being interviewed, don't bother to send up your card and give him a chance to run away. Go right to his room — or wherever he is — and walk right up to him. If he's behind a locked door, just wait patiently outside till somebody comes along with a pitcher of ice-water or something. Then step right in and confront him. It looks impudent — no wonder you blush — but it has to be done. Remember, you are after your story, and you can't afford to displease your managing editor and perhaps lose your job. Think of how I persisted in following that woman all day — just to get a snap-shot of her when she didn't know it. It takes the patience of Ruth's mother-in-law; and it's the hardest thing in the world to have patience when you must get a story for an early edition and haven't much time. But Patience and Persistence are the heavenly twins that place the

aspiring reporter in the shoes of the Managing Editor."

"I'm going to try it again," flared Carl. "I'm not used to being turned down that way — especially when I'm helping Ned."

"That's a plucky boy," eulogized Miss Caldwell. "I hope you'll succeed. I'll see you later, for I'm going to be in this lobby the rest of the day. I have to get a story a yard long, but I'm not discouraged."

Carl again buckled on his armor and set forth to beard the Connecticut lion in his den. But after a long and discouraging wait, he was compelled to suffer a still greater disappointment. Knowing the persistence of young reporters, it was obvious that the renowned Senator had forsaken his room for the remainder of the day. Though the lad knocked at the door of 411 till his knuckles tingled, and waited in the hall till he had to lean against the walls for support, he received no reward for his persistence. As Miss Caldwell had suggested, Senator A—— was undoubtedly hiding under his bed.

At four o'clock he found himself back in the hotel office comparing notes with Gath Singleton, who had just come in — hot, tired, and bearishly cross. Evidently Gath had been sorely pressed, to

such an extent that he had formed a most unfavorable opinion of the Congressman from Ohio.

"Did you get him?" asked Carl, following Gath to a far corner where they both languidly sank down upon a leather lounge.

"Did I get him!" Gath was so comically indignant that, to save his life, Carl could not keep back his laughter. "You've treated me outrageously," Gath went on disgustedly. "You sent me out to interview the meanest man of the Convention."

"No, I didn't," denied Carl. "Jack Gore said the hardest one to handle is the Senator from Iowa."

"Well, if he's any worse than the one I met, he's a wild boar," ranted Gath. "First, I went to the Convention to find Congressman G——. He wasn't there. Some guy in the Ohio section said I was sure to find him at the Blackstone; so I went over there. His Majesty was not registered there. Went back to headquarters. Couldn't get any clue of him. So I started out to go the rounds of the other leading hotels. He wasn't at the La Salle. No one there had ever heard of him. Went to the Sherman — but nothing doing. Tried the Great Northern. A man by that name was staying there. He was way up — on the twenty-first floor,

I believe. Took an elevator and routed the man out. He wasn't the one I was after. Then I tried the Brevoort, but with no success. At last I came back to headquarters. There I got a tip that he was putting up at the University Club. Went over there. On the way I met some people I knew, and stopped to exchange a sentence or two. Then I forgot the Congressman's name. To save my neck, I couldn't remember it! Went back to headquarters and got it, after a row with a surly clerk. Went back to the University Club and found that the Congressman had checked out and was at the Hotel Morrison. I chased over there — found him in Room 1217. Knocked at the door and was admitted. Slipped on a rug and fell sprawling at the Congressman's feet."

"You saw him!" cried Carl, beside himself with curiosity.

"I should say I did." Gath glared reproachfully at his companion. "Of course, I saw him when I got up. He yelled like an Indian when I fell on his feet. We were both scared —"

"Such a ridiculous situation!" Carl wanted to roar, but one glance at his irate friend warned him that it was better to remain respectfully quiet.

"He took me for a pickpocket or a bandit," Gath

rambled on. "Called me a thief, an upstart, a fresh imposter, and other names you wouldn't expect a learned senator to use. I didn't have time to say a word — not a word. Before I knew it, he took me by the collar and threw me out in the hall. I picked myself up and ran down ten flights of stairs. I'll get even with that fellow, I tell you! The very idea of treating me that way — and my great-grandfather one of the first settlers in Chicago!"

"Yet I suppose the Senator can hardly be blamed," dared Carl, able to see the point of view that eminent statesman must have held. "You should have explained that you were a reporter as soon as you stepped inside the room."

"But I didn't step inside — I *slid* in, I tell you!" Gath impatiently tossed about in the spell of what he termed Carl's stupidity.

"That's so," was the sympathetic admission. "I think you acted all right, from the newspaper standpoint — up to the time you slipped. There are so many things to watch during these interviewing games. For one thing, they say it's very necessary for a reporter to make a graceful entrance. First appearances are everything."

"Oh, I've learned that," sputtered Gath. "But I'm not keen to learn the newspaper profession —

after the way I've been running around for several hours. It's a wonder I'm here to tell you about it. I feel like a caged squirrel sea-sick from turning around in a wheel he can't stop."

Carl sat silent for at least a minute. Reporting was no easy task; yet it had some sort of lure about it — something adventurous that was beneficial to a boy actuated by a firm purpose. "Well, don't take it to heart," he advised. "I failed on my assignment, too. Senator A—— was hiding under his bed, I think. Didn't get half as close to my interview as you did yours."

"That's no consolation to me," snapped Gath. "Now how would you feel if you were just getting ready to take a big bite out of a red apple, and Fate knocked the apple out of your reach? Wouldn't you feel too green for words?"

Carl admitted that he would; yet he thought there would be some consolation in having had a peek at the apple.

"Your family always seem to get something out of every downright calamity," growled Gath. "I honestly believe if you lost your right arm, Carl, you'd jump up and wave the other and make a big hurrah because you hadn't lost both of 'em. Or if a blue-racer took after you and scared you

nearly to death, you'd remember what a pretty color it was. But I'll get even with that Ohio potentate —"

At this stage Carl capitulated to his besieging desire to laugh; and Gath joined in before he could devise some fitting punishment for the famous representative of the Buckeye State. "I'll make a proposition," Carl went on with difficulty. "Let's tackle the third one together. Possibly both of us together can land the Senator from Iowa. It may turn out to be a great lark."

Then Miss Ethel Caldwell came through the hotel office. She was very busy, and her "caddy" with his camera was following her with the persistence of a shadow on a sunny day. She espied Carl and advanced to speak to him.

"I'm glad to see you once more," he said as he rose respectfully. The young woman seemed equally pleased; for it is one of the amenities of the newspaper game when a reporter meets a person who is disinterestedly civil. "I want you to know my friend, Mr. Singleton. He lives here in Chicago."

Miss Caldwell had heard of the Singletons, and knew all their neighbors. During the few minutes she talked, the boys decided that she had met

everybody worth while, including all the notable people of the Convention.

"Perhaps you know Senator V—— of Iowa," interrupted Carl. "Jack Gore says he's a very disagreeable man to meet, so Gath and I thought we'd tackle him together."

"You're very wise in being cautious," laughed Miss Caldwell. "Fortunately I happen to know where he is; I've just been talking to his wife, and she gave me her address. It's extremely likely that she and her husband are staying at the same place, Room 318, Palmer House. Go ahead, Mr. Merrymaker, and keep your nerve. Senator V—— hates to have reporters breaking in upon his privacy — so his wife said. No one in Chicago knows where he is except myself; but it's no harm to tell a representative of an outside paper. The truth is, the senator does not interest me in the least. My work has been with his wife, who has one of the biggest collections of butterflies in the United States."

When Miss Caldwell had gone, Gath gave a whistle of surprise and stared admiringly at Carl. "How did you get acquainted with her?" he quizzed.

"Oh, you know how journalists are always meeting one another," responded Carl, as indifferently

as though he were accustomed to meeting such brilliant people as Miss Caldwell every day of his life. "We got to talking over our work this morning in the lobby; she gave me one or two good pointers."

"She's a famous writer," declared Gath. "Sometimes she can get the story of a big robbery or murder when all the other reporters fail. You see, being a woman, she goes right into a house of mourning and weeps with the family — finds out everything there is to know, while the men reporters line up outside. Moreover, she's sincere in her grief, too, and always wants to do the right thing if it doesn't interfere with her story. And she supports her mother and some younger brothers and sisters. The newspaper people all say she's square; she helps everybody and does a great deal of good. You were lucky to meet her, Carl."

"I knew she was no ordinary girl as soon as I clapped my eyes on her," boasted Carl. "Yet I believe Marje would make just as good a lady reporter. She's tactful and conscientious, and a whirlwind of energy. As for me — I don't believe I have the gift — as Ned and Marje have. I'm not quick enough. I love to study a crowd; but I haven't any nose for news, and I hate to pry into people's business. I wouldn't be on this assign-

ment if I hadn't wanted to help Ned; he's so overworked."

"But we've made a botch of it thus far," grumbled Gath; howbeit, he smiled humorously. "Now let's nail that Senator from Iowa and have it over with. Then I never want to see another politician or newspaper reporter — they make me nervous. It's lucky Miss Caldwell happened along and told us where to find Senator V——, otherwise we'd have another long hunt."

In less than a quarter of an hour they had located the Iowa senator at the Palmer House and were awaiting a response to their knock at his door.

"If he gets abusive, stand your ground," Gath whispered excitedly. "Don't budge a foot unless he kicks you out and you can't help yourself. Above all, don't start in by giving him one of those rare smiles you always carry around with you. He's a bear — so look serious; better look severe."

"I'm ready for him," returned Carl, immediately taking Gath's advice to look severe. "He'll order me right away, I suppose — but I won't go. Now be sure to make an impressive entrance — and watch out for rugs."

"If he dares to lay a hand on either of us, I'll not be responsible for what I do," threatened Gath,

so loudly that Carl made an impatient gesture in order to restrain him.

"I've thought over everything I'm going to say," assured Carl. "Be ready to walk right in when he opens the door."

It was not surprising that the Iowa Senator looked mystified when two very aggressive-looking lads stepped into his presence a moment later, though he seemed to understand that their stern faces were intended simply to assure him that they were capable of protecting themselves. Be that as it may, the Senator was one of the most civil personages they had ever met; both his voice and his manner were symbols of the highest type of good breeding.

"Won't you sit down, boys?" they heard him say as he actually moved the best chairs into comfortable positions by the open window. The lads sat down, not any too gracefully. At once they saw that their preparations to bully him were of no avail; but they were too much inexperienced to know just what to do after finding that they must adopt more genial tactics. They cringed when the great celebrity continued in a voice as smooth and silvery as Iowa corn-silk: "What can I do for you? I was taking my nap before dinner."

This announcement rendered the boys still more

helpless, inasmuch as they could not understand why such a great man could speak of an interrupted nap with such placidity. "We — we are very sorry we disturbed you," began Carl, moving restlessly in his big velvet chair.

As for Gath he could say nothing. He sat a few paces behind Carl, all the time gazing at the startling design in the middle of the Turkish rug.

"We're doing a little newspaper work," squeaked Carl, forgetting to use his deeper tones; consequently he blushed and began to flounder.

"Where are your badges?" pleasantly inquired the Senator.

"We're just helping my brother Ned; he's a correspondent for a New York paper," lamely explained Carl. "He's swamped with the minutes of the Convention, so I'm helping him out on some interviews. He — he thought it would be a good thing for me to meet such noted men."

"That is very kind of you," said the senator, so forbearingly that Carl longed either to jump out of the window or, if possible, to disappear like a coil of cigarette smoke. "Always be kind to your brother, my boy," softly added the speaker. At this remark Gath coughed nervously.

"I'd like very much to have a little talk with you," Carl went on appealingly.

"What shall we talk about? Proceed to question me."

But the situation was made all the more unbearable to Carl when the Senator passed him a plate of red bananas. Each boy took one and held it with unprecedented awkwardness while the renowned gentleman continued: "Shall we converse upon Political Economy, Ethics, Philosophy, Anthropology, or International Diplomacy?"

"I — I think we'd better stick to politics," weakly suggested Carl.

"I couldn't do that," replied the Senator with excessive modesty. Then he lighted a cigar and began smoking, the while smiling upon his young visitors as if they were some very near and unexpected relatives from a distant destination. "I don't like to talk about my business. That is why I did not let anybody know where I am staying. Nobody knows except my dear wife — and she is too honorable to tell. Many politicians try so hard to get into print — but I don't approve of it."

Then to their greater mystification the Senator began to air a topic neither of them had ever heard discussed; furthermore, he made use of words un-

known to their vocabularies, though they had both been well grounded in English Composition and General History. This was especially hard to endure; already they were exhausted from the violent exertion they had undergone while locating the other two celebrities; then too, the air was hot and stifling, the noise from the street distracting, and the smoke from the Senator's cigar decidedly nauseating. What did they know about Hassam Aga and Hayridden, Horic and Selim Entim; or what purpose the Senator had in using such shocking names to illustrate the precepts he was expounding? Carl shifted uneasily in his chair; but the Senator went on, now and then extending his arms appealingly to the wash-stand he seemed to be addressing. Never before had the lad been subjected to such a flood of eloquence.

A snort from Gath caused Carl to jump as though a bomb had been hurled through the window. To his horror he found that his friend had suddenly fallen asleep, only to be awakened by his own snoring. Yet the senator, oblivious to all save his inspired oratory, rambled on to the end.

When he had come out of his trance, his eyes danced triumphantly as he announced: "That is the address I am going to make at the Coliseum,

near the close of the Convention. I've been working on it for days. I hope you liked it; it's sure to arouse the people as no other address has ever done."

"Your address!" cried Carl, thoroughly aghast. "I — I —"

"No doubt you are surprised that I should give you every word of it; but I knew it would be good practice for me — and at the same time it would help you to get some news. Every reporter in Chicago would give his day's pay to have only a few sentences of it. But you heard it all, my boy; and you were a very patient and attentive little audience."

"Can't I have a copy of the address to take along with me?" begged Carl. "Brother Ned will be delighted to have it."

"I dare say he would," said the Senator with a provoking smile. "But I haven't a copy of it. It all came right out of my head. I hope you won't forget a word of it, or report me inaccurately. Learn always to stick to the truth, my boy."

"Thank you, sir," stammered Carl, just as a distant clock struck six. "You — you were very kind."

"Don't mention it, my boy. Good-by and good

luck to you." Then the Senator with the tenderness of a doting mother ushered his unprotesting guests into the hall and shut the door upon them.

"Well, wouldn't that melt your heart!" muttered Gath as they beat their hasty retreat. "What was the guy talking about?"

"Why didn't you keep your ears open — instead of going to sleep?" fumed Carl, as yet unable to see any humor in this crowning predicament of the day.

"Search me," said Gath indifferently as he continued down the stairs as swiftly as if the Senator were after him to deliver him another address. "I thought the poor old man was suffering from the heat till he got up and said it was the speech he intends to give at the Coliseum — the big speech of the Convention. I think I made my entrance fairly well, but I forgot to concentrate my mind. And I don't remember a thing he said except that it's easier for a goose to crawl through a crack in a rail fence than to fly over it. Seems to me any goose ought to know that much."

"We're failures — both of us!" cried Carl in desperation.

"At any rate I didn't slip on his rug — like I did when I rushed at the Ohio Senator," laughed

Gath. "Besides, each of us got a banana from him. I'm going to put mine in my curio collection."

"Don't ever mention bananas again," irritably protested Carl; "I hate the sight of 'em."

When Carl arrived at his aunt's apartment, he found the family at dinner. Jack Gore was present; and everything would have been as merry as the component parts of a festival, had it not been for the fact that they were all worrying about his absence. So, under the circumstances, it was but natural that the entire household should rush at him when he came straggling in. Ned reprimanded him for working so hard, Marje congratulated him for having escaped a sun-stroke, and Jean said she had prayed that a truck might not have hit him; Rex was overjoyed at the thought of having him back, and Aunt Esther furnished the clever balance for all the excitement by quietly remarking that she hoped his dinner was not spoiled.

"Oh, Carl dear, where have you been?" Marje insisted.

"Helping Jack Gore report the Convention," was the dogged reply. "This reporter business is no easy job."

"And did you get some nice interviews from those notable politicians we sent you after?" asked Jack Gore, so tantalizingly that Carl's tired eyes began to glow dangerously.

"No, I didn't get any interviews," confessed the boy, suffering still more the pangs that always follow defeat. "It took all our time to find where they're hiding themselves. I don't think much of 'em."

"Where are they?" Ned asked eagerly.

"Senator A—— is in Room 411 at the Congress Hotel — hiding under the bed; Congressman G—— is in Room 1217 at the Hotel Morrison, and Senator V—— in Room 318 at the Palmer House."

"Smooth work — capital!" screeched Jack Gore, to Carl's infinite amazement. "That boy surely has the newspaper instinct; he'll make a marvelous reporter. Why, Ned and I have tried three days to find where those three shy birds are roosting — but we were unable to locate 'em! None of the Chicago reporters have run 'em down so far — and Chicago is a big place to search. After dinner, Ned, we must get on our bonnets and give them a call. We'll get some news worth while, and have the Convention stirred to the limit. Carl, you're a big sensation! How on earth did you manage to find 'em?"

"Oh, I can't tell you the whole story now," Carl answered rather feebly, as he sat down to Marje's steaming pot-pie. "Gath Singleton and that Miss Caldwell helped me; I don't deserve all the credit."

"But you *do*," insisted Ned, giving his brother's limp hand a demonstrative shake; while Jean, realizing only that Carl had distinguished himself, showed sisterly approval by running over to him and imprinting a resounding kiss on his chin. "You're persistent, Carl — and you've worked hard, no matter what you say," resumed Ned. "Now that you've found where those three human machines are hidden — those three unseen forces of this mighty Convention — Jack and I will do the rest. We'd have failed utterly if it hadn't been for you."

"Ned," warned Carl, as the two regular reporters rose to pursue their round through Chicago's hotel district, "it might be well for you to take the Senator from Iowa some bananas; he prefers the red ones. And perhaps you can get him to recite the address he's going to spring on the Convention in a day or two — so you'll get it in advance of the other newspapers. And when you go into the room of the Ohio Senator, watch out for the rug; it slips terribly."

CHAPTER IV

A BUSY DAY FOR AUNT ESTHER

Bordering Lake Michigan and almost smothered by other northerly suburbs of Chicago is a beautiful village, which, for the sake of discretion, shall be chronicled herein as Andover — simply for the reason that its actual name is more unlike Andover than any other to be found in the telephone directory. Inasmuch as the main incidents of this episode are true, it would not be tactful to designate this suburb accurately, nor to mention the name of its leading minister of the gospel, who, for the present, shall be known as Dr. Vane.

Aunt Esther Fortune had formerly lived in Andover; and because of her loyalty to Dr. and Mrs. Vane had kept up membership in their church, despite the fact that she attended it only three or four times a year. It was a duty call that summoned her to this village on the day following Carl's success in cornering three of the biggest and most secretive men of the Convention, thus enabling Jack Gore and Ned to get some very important news,

including the entire speech of the Iowa Senator. Consequently, Carl felt that his perplexing work had been rewarded, and again he realized that the darkest and most discouraging hour sometimes ushers in a glorious dawn.

He was sitting with the chauffeur, while Mrs. Fortune and the younger Merrymakers were snugly fitting the other seats of the motor-car. Though the main part of Chicago was sweltering in the hot sun, the charming suburb of Andover was being fanned by a lake breeze; and as they more deeply penetrated its circling thoroughfares, he observed that the lawns and trees were not grayish-green with dust as they were along Grand Boulevard. Indeed Carl was delighted with the Fairyland at that moment opening up to him, though the chauffeur insisted that Andover was no more attractive than at least a dozen other suburbs for which the Windy City is celebrated. His brothers and sisters were also pleased with their surroundings; Marje called attention to the picturesque old homes and the modish new bungalows; Jean thought the fountains and the green waste-paper baskets that adorned each street-corner "perfectly darling." Truly their happiness would have been complete if Ned had been with them; yet it was consoling to

know that he would join them at dinner, and that Jack Gore was to furnish the ice-cream.

"Mrs. Fassett will be alarmed when she sees what a big family you have, Aunt Esther," laughed Marje. "She might think we expect to stay for dinner, and you know how people detest strange guests during hot weather."

"She'll be delighted to have you," assured Mrs. Fortune. "Mrs. Fassett is a typical Chicago mother; she's used to entertaining, and she's nice to strangers. Of course, for certain reasons she's eager to meet Carl, though I haven't told him exactly what she wants him to do. You can take Jean and Rex out in the pergola, if you like, and get acquainted with Mrs. Fassett's delightful daughters. Nell Fassett is about your age, and I imagine Agnes is a year or two younger."

"There surely is a load of us," remarked Jean, "with all these bundles you're taking to the pastor and his family. It's a wonder our car doesn't collapse."

"The heavier the load, the easier the car runs," sang out Mrs. Fortune, who was rapidly outgrowing her headaches and learning to discriminate between distracting sounds and the happy noises of the home-grown variety.

"And the bigger the family, the easier it gets along," said Marje without an iota of doubt.

Mrs. Fortune remarked that everything depended on the kind of family, yet at the time she thought the Merrymakers got along exceedingly well, considering that its members were boys and girls ranging all the way from young childhood to practical man and womanhood. But her words were cut short by the appearance of the old Fassett mansion — a solid brick structure with a cupola; it was almost entirely screened from public view by trees and shrubbery, dark green against a rolling lawn.

"What a home-like old building!" exclaimed Marje. "And look at the stone steps leading up to the big piazza — and the clematis vines and trumpet buds!"

"Wouldn't it be a fine place to play hidy-whoop in, on a rainy day?" cried Rex, equally enthusiastic.

"And it has an attic with little round windows all around the house," quoth Jean. "I've always wanted an attic to play in — and a cupola."

But before they could spin out their original comments, the front door of the mansion opened and Mrs. Fassett appeared — a woman of fifty, perhaps, with that rosy and wholesome complexion which seems to thrive in the vicinity of the Great

Lakes. All the children approved of her at sight, Marje and Jean as usual wishing that they had a mother exactly like her.

"I'm so glad to see you, Mrs. Fortune," she greeted as she grasped her lady visitor by the hand and led her into a great hall with a screened fireplace at its far end. Then Aunt Esther introduced her young companions to their hostess, and that good lady presented them all to her two pretty daughters. The Merrymaker girls were delighted — suspecting, as they did, that there would be a party out in the pergola, to say nothing of lemonade and cakes.

"And this is Mr. Carl Merrymaker," repeated Mrs. Fassett as she shook the boy's hand with great cordiality. "Your aunt seems to think you a very remarkable young man."

But before Carl had time to stammer his thanks and to assure the gracious stranger that his aunt had over-rated him, Mrs. Fortune set him at ease by saying: "Of course, any aunt is apt to think a dutiful nephew remarkable in every way, whether or not he is. At any rate, Carl is a considerate boy — and full of mischief; though he doesn't make so much noise as this little cyclone. Surely Rex is a whole houseful most of the time."

"Agnes, take the children out to the frog-pond," Mrs. Fassett instructed her younger daughter, a red-cheeked lass with a wealth of shining hair. "It would be a shame to keep that dear little boy penned up in my drawing-room on such a lovely day. Nell, take Miss Marjorie in to meet the ladies; then you can go out to the tennis court. But Mr. Carl is my prisoner." She turned smilingly towards him and laid a detaining hand on his arm as she continued: "We want your best suggestions this afternoon. Your aunt says you are very expert in planning events and carrying them through to a successful finish."

This eulogy abashed Carl all the more, yet he gallantly replied: "I'll do my best, Mrs. Fassett, though I don't know just what you want me to do. My brother Ned is far more clever; he's reporting the big Convention."

By this time Mrs. Fassett had led him into the drawing-room where three ladies were seated in a row on a horse-hair sofa; they were talking to his aunt, who had preceded him into the apartment and was making herself at home. Carl soon found himself being introduced with that rather uncomfortable pompousness that attends the presentation of a great celebrity to a very ordinary public. There was

Mrs. Vane, the pastor's wife, a nice little body of the gray mouse variety; she had bright eyes, midget hands and feet, and rather mincing ways. Then there were two other women whose names he immediately forgot; one of these was tall and thin, the other short and plump. He paid most of his attention to Mrs. Vane, however, inasmuch as she was the minister's wife and deserved all the courtesy due her from the only man present.

Between words he had a chance to observe that this home-like drawing-room was not so elegant as that of his aunt; yet it seemed to have the comfortable atmosphere characterizing a home lived in by an interesting family, and presided over by a person with strong and individual personality. It was not a place destined for show; its carpet was too badly worn in spots, and the handsome old chairs had been too much battered with constant usage. Yet he felt strangely rested before he had sat there long in that abode of a happy family — an abode that could not easily be mistaken for an art gallery, a furniture store, or an undertaker's chapel.

He wondered if he were attending one of those mothers' meetings Bess so often had spoken of in such bitter terms — especially on a hot day when

everybody was cross and one or two unmarried women insisted upon having their own way. His reflections were cut short, however, when his aunt said with touching confidence: "I've told my nephew, Carl Merrymaker, about the committee meeting we are to hold here to-day; but I didn't have an opportunity to explain it to him thoroughly. I've enlightened him as to how our Home Missionary Society is divided into three sections, for the reason that this town has three wards; he also knows that I belong to the third ward, and that it is our duty to do something in order to raise money for improving the parsonage — but that's all I've told him. He doesn't know that we've racked our brains till our heads ache, but we can't think of a thing to do that will interest our church members and raise the necessary funds. So I brought him along — to talk things over with our committee. If he fails me, it will be the first time; for he's the brightest boy to think up things, I ever saw. You should have heard about the way he helped his brother at the Republican Convention yesterday —"

"Please, Aunt Esther — don't," begged the boy, beginning to perspire. "I can't do anything worth while — but I can help. And if everybody in this third ward helps —"

"Good!" voiced the pastor's wife, alarming Carl still more by patting him approvingly on the shoulder. "If all our church members were like Mr. Carl, the poor minister and his wife would find it smoother sailing. The world is so full of shirkers."

"But whatever we do, we must be quick about it; we have less than a week to make good," incited Mrs. Fassett, stopping her rocker long enough to speak for the cause. "We must get to work immediately; we have at least two hundred dollars to raise. I hope we can accumulate more money than the first and second wards put together; I'm sure I'll do everything in my power to get ahead of them."

The other ladies said they would be willing to work as hard as Mrs. Fassett, Mrs. Fortune adding that she would set all the Merrymakers to work, for the reason that they never were so well amused as when they were doing something useful.

"Did you ever give an ice-cream social?" asked Marje, who with Nell Fassett had risen to go out in the cool grounds back of the mansion. "Mrs. Fassett has such a beautiful lawn, and so many lovely trees to hang Japanese lanterns in."

"Don't mention ice-cream socials!" exclaimed the plump and pretty woman named Little.

"We've served enough ice-cream and strawberries to keep Chicago in rations for a month. And we've baked tons of cakes and daubed them over with barrels of frosting —"

"And served all kinds of meals, even to griddle-cakes in pie-pans and coffee in tin-cups," interrupted Mrs. Sparks, an entirely different type of woman — one tall, thin, and not so pleasant of countenance. From her attitude Carl judged that she was one of the dray-horses of the church; she looked so capable, yet so over-worked and suspicious.

"We've had tag-days, rummage sales, and church fairs — everything that seemed appropriate, in fact," went on Mrs. Fassett. "Now we want something different — something new; and we want to make the other wards feel that they'll have to hustle to get ahead of us."

"In other words, you want to knock their eye out," waggishly interposed Carl.

"Indeed, we do," laughed the pastor's wife. "I live in the third ward, and my family is outgrowing the parsonage. We want an addition built on, and we've been a year trying to raise the money. It seems that it will never be built, so long as people give nickels to home missions and dimes to the movies."

Obviously the minister's wife had a way of speaking her own mind. Carl admired her immensely; he understood what her feelings must be at this critical hour when her ward had run out of ideas as to how to raise money for the purpose of affording her two extra bedrooms and a newly shingled roof.

"I think the main trouble is our inability to get the members of the church interested," sighed the thin lady named Sparks.

"True, my dear," endorsed the plump lady. "A few of us work till our hands are blistered — just to get up amusements to please the public; and at the last minute — when we are all fagged out — we have to go out and coax people to come in and patronize us. There doesn't seem to be any money in anything we do. We give suppers for twenty-five cents apiece, and everybody that comes eats fifty cents worth or more. What is left over, we give to the poor. I ask you — what money is there in that kind of business?"

Carl was much interested in this discussion pertaining to the workings of the local church. He had been trained to see from viewpoints not his own; so it did not take him long to discover that these sisters in distress needed advice, though a boy of his age might not be able to help them very much.

He felt compassion for this third ward committee; and when one is interested in others, some opportunity of rendering them assistance is usually afforded. But what could he suggest? No idea seemed to come to him — possibly because, by this time, all the committee were talking at once, no two of them agreeing in their opinions.

"I'm tired to death of the way we have to feed people — and try to get them to thinking they are having a good time, just to help along a worthy cause," fumed the plump lady with the double chin. Still, Carl could see that she was one willing to work her fingers off — growing fatter every minute from the exercise — if she were only sure that her efforts were meeting with general approbation.

"What do you suggest, Carl?" inquired his aunt, apparently somewhat vexed that he was so slow in getting an inspiration.

"I've found out what the matter is," he began cautiously. "It looks to me as if you are all doing more than your share of the work —"

"Just so," agreed the pastor's wife. "Of course, the men pay their money; but they don't do any of the actual planning, nor any of the hard work. A few of them come and eat, pay their

money, and get away as fast as they can. Now what kind of coöperation do you call that?"

"I abominate people that don't do anything except stand around and pay their share of the expenses," said the fat lady, though it was evident by the way she spoke that she had never abominated any human being. "Some people are always willing to pay; but they don't do a thing to create — or to push any enterprise along. They leave the slavery to people with brains."

"I think," went on Carl soberly, "we will get the men and the boys of this third ward to work. But of course we'll have to interest them in order to enlist their services."

"How are you going to do it?" inquired the thin lady. "The men of this town are not notable for their sociability — that is, so far as the church is concerned. And they always over-work the excuse that they have to look after their business. All they think about is business. It would take a great deal of persuasion to get them started. Even if the President of the United States made a personal visit to each of them, to get them interested in church doings, they'd have some excuse or other."

"If Aunt Esther will let me have her car tomorrow, I'll see what I can do," Carl said with

tremendous courage. "You ladies must give me a list of every man and boy of your church located in the third ward; I'll spend all day calling on them. I'm sure I can get them interested in this affair. A good American will do anything for his country, his state, his town, and his ward — whether he goes to church or not, if you appeal to him in the right way."

The members of the committee were all enthusiastic; they complimented Carl roundly, though the plump lady with the pretty face was sure he would tire of his task before he should get half way through.

"We'll have to get them curious," laughed Carl. "Many good men who take a wrong step do it from curiosity; and most of them who take a right step, do it from the same motive. Satisfy a man's appetite, and he'll lose interest in the table as soon as he's eaten all he wants. Keep his curiosity going — and you have him right by the neck; that is, if he's a healthy man with a good imagination."

"Why, Carl!" rebuked his aunt, notwithstanding that she joined in the general laugh led by the pastor's wife. It was possible that this committee meeting was being transformed into a gala affair; yet they were getting closer to the object of their

search instead of deeper into the mire of doubt and distraction.

"But what are you going to do after you excite the curiosity of the men and the boys?" asked the minister's wife, curious to the tips of her little squirrel ears.

Carl guffawed — especially when he saw that all of them — even to his aunt — were craning their necks towards him, in order to satisfy their natural thirst for something novel.

"I'm not going to tell you now," he said. "I'll keep you curious till the third ward gives its brilliant event next Thursday night. And I'll not let any of the men and boys tell you what we expect to do."

"But how can you give a church affair without the help of us women?" queried thin Mrs. Sparks. "You'll have to let us into the secret — we're on the committee."

"No; I'm going to keep you curious," declared Carl with emphasis. "I don't want you working yourselves to shadows, getting all tired out — possibly losing your looks. You're to rest till the night of the event rolls around; then you must all come, in your best clothes and humors. You'll have nothing to do — absolutely nothing, except to be agree-

able and leave it all to me. The men and boys of the third ward will assume all the responsibilities and do all the work. You are to be entertained; but you must bring plenty of money along to spend, and get others to do the same. You'll be like baseball fans; you must root."

"Indeed we will," avowed the pastor's wife.

A half-hour later, the committee, much relieved after casting their burden upon the shoulders of a visiting boy less than sixteen, bade Carl a cordial good-by as he and his aunt were summoning their flock for a brisk ride back home.

So it happened that before sunset every woman and girl of the third ward was curious to know just what the young stranger was planning for the following Thursday evening, in order to raise the required amount of money for enlarging the parsonage and mending its leaky roof. On the other hand, all their men and boys were as eager to know what the young stranger intended to tell them next day, after he should seek them out in a motor-car. A few of them planned to leave town; others declared they would not be imposed upon during office hours by a mere infant like Carl Merrymaker, who undoubtedly had a great deal of assurance. But it ended that these men and boys were so curious that

all of them eagerly awaited his coming next day; indeed, one of the older men was considerably hurt when Carl failed to see him, for the reason that the committee had refrained from putting his name on the list because he had the reputation of being a "perfect bear." Furthermore, these curious men and boys were so eager to keep the women and girls curious, they refused to betray Carl's secret. Consequently, it was only a little while before not only the third ward, but the whole town, was rampant with curiosity.

When Mrs. Fortune reached her apartment that evening, she was met at the door by Jack Gore and Ned. Jack was wearing Marje's gingham apron, and Ned had on the white one she usually wore at table. Both of these young reporters were very red in the face, yet smiling as if they had been enjoying the over-heated Convention more than ordinarily.

"Oh, I smell onions!" cried Marje, pretending to be overcome by faintness as she clutched at the wall.

There was no doubt of it. Never in its history had Mrs. Fortune's elegant apartment been so redolent of that delicious but questionable odor pro-

ceeding from onions freshly placed on a warm range. Little wonder it was that the exquisite lady of the house clapped her hands over her nose and ran into the drawing-room to throw the windows wider open. Noise was disagreeable enough; but the smell of onions was a dire offense, especially during hot weather. She laughed, nevertheless, when she returned to the hall to remove her hat; for she realized that some very unusual recreation of a jolly nature was progressing in the kitchen, where all the youngsters were talking and laughing together, and Jack Gore was comically switching about in his flowing apron and making a great monkey of himself.

Mrs. Fortune actually braved the kitchen, though she was almost overcome by the fumes rising like uncanny incense from a wooden bowl heaped high with peeled onions.

"I'm so glad I gave you the key, Ned," she said faintly. For having learned from Carl that a "good fellow" is the loveliest thing any woman can be, Mrs. Fortune was determined to emulate the Merrymakers by being a good fellow; moreover, she would follow in their footsteps and make the best of any situation, however staggering, that should come her way. Still she did not feel particularly

edified at the prospect of treading a path reeking with the fumes of onions.

"I made myself at home, just as you told me to do," assured Ned, though somewhat sheepishly, after discovering that his dainty aunt was actually suffering pain.

"I didn't mean to be so late," went on Mrs. Fortune, stepping very close to the bowl of onions, in order to prove beyond peradventure of a doubt that she was already the best of good fellows. "You see, we were out on the North Shore, and we came back through Lincoln Park —"

"And we saw the loveliest scenery in the world," interrupted Jean. "I wished all the time that you and Bess could have been along, Ned."

"Jack and I got away from the Convention a little earlier to-day," went on the eldest of the Merry-makers, amused at the buoyancy of his brothers and sisters. "We thought it would be fun to surprise you with a supper — but you got here a little early. Please don't find fault because we've used all the kitchen utensils in the house, Marje. And please, Aunt Esther, forgive me for taking such liberties. I surely have made myself at home, and so has Jack."

"I know what you're doing," said Marje, before

Mrs. Fortune could tell them that the sky was the limit of her own home. "You're cooking beefsteak and onions — goody, goody! There's nothing so delicious —"

"Unless it's liver and cauliflower," put in Carl.

"Or ham and cabbage," added the fairy-like Jean.

"But what will my fashionable neighbors think!" groaned Mrs. Fortune, in spite of the efforts she was making to be considered a good fellow. Then she laughed rather nervously and continued as if in atonement: "What a lark! Imagine two New York newspaper correspondents cooking a meal in my house! It makes me feel so helpless."

"Never mind, Aunt Esther," joked Ned; "these onions will give you strength — they're wonderful, the way Jack cooks them."

"We've been pining to break into somebody's kitchen and get up a meal to suit ourselves," said Jack Gore, his eyes filled with tears as he dashed a plateful of sliced onions into a big skillet. "We got so tired of hotel cooking. I think this change of diet may save our lives."

"And don't worry about the neighbors, Aunt Esther," consoled Ned, the while hammering a red and juicy steak of unusual thickness: "the truth is, everybody in this building would like to be with us.

Wherever you smell onions, you're pretty sure to find good company."

"I want you to feel perfectly at home," declared Mrs. Fortune. By this time she had reached the conclusion that the taint of onions might not be injurious to the rose-colored draperies in the drawing-room and the tapestry separating the dining-room from the hall-library, though these luxurious hangings for many years had been steeped in the scent of roses. "Shan't I help you?" she pleaded. "I'm not very competent in a kitchen; but you can show me how to do things."

"No — please don't get mixed up in this affair, Aunt Esther," said Ned. "Just go into the dining-room, and take Marje along. It makes men nervous to have critical women supervising them when they try to cook; you know, men have their own way of doing such work. Now Jack, don't throw any more peelings into the coal-scuttle; you're the most untidy scullery maid I ever saw. Wrap them up in paper and bury them deep in the garbage-pail on the back stoop."

"Let not one of them be spared to mock us!" cried Jack dramatically as he hastily obeyed.

"We got this steak in a corner butcher-shop over on Indiana Avenue," went on Ned, talking loudly

to compel the attention of Mrs. Fortune and the girls, who had gone into the dining-room to set the table. "These are the strongest onions I ever saw — perfect darlings. Actually all the people stared at us for blocks away; I dare say they wanted to rob us."

"The idea of a beefsteak on such a night!" giggled Marje.

"And isn't it curious," laughed Mrs. Fortune, "that whenever a woman leaves her house in charge of her men folk, she's sure to come back and find it reeking with onions?"

"Unless her men folks are sickly or rather finnicky," put in Carl, who from the first had heartily approved of Ned's menu.

At that juncture, excitement of a suppressed nature ensued when Ned dropped the precious broiler into the coals. But after considerable effort, and much additional perspiring on the part of Jack and Ned, the sizzling morsel was rescued and neatly scraped with an iron spoon.

"You people in the dining-room might settle the drink question," called out Jack Gore. "I hope you'll decide to have something besides lake water."

"Strawberry pop," suggested Rex.

"Or iced-tea," said Jean. "It'll cool us off better."

"Neither one of them goes well with steak and onions," objected Marje.

"I want ginger ale," almost demanded Carl.

"Hot tea suits me," spoke up Mrs. Fortune.

"Strong coffee," voted Jack Gore, only to be overwhelmed with ridicule.

"Milk," said Marje.

"My, what differences of opinion!" came back Ned from the range. "I guess we'll have to hold another family consultation. Come out here in this hot-box of a kitchen and let's fight it out."

Soon he was surrounded by the others — just at that tantalizing moment when he was flopping the gigantic steak upon a hot platter — a sight that made even Mrs. Fortune ravenously hungry. "Now let's put it to a quick vote," he advised. "What shall we drink?"

"Why can't we all have what we want?" asked Mrs. Fortune. "You can have your cocoa, as usual, Ned, and I'm keen for a cup of hot tea. I want all my guests to be pleased."

"We always find it great fun to conform," laughed Ned. "We'll all agree upon the same beverage and be thankful to get it."

Mrs. Fortune was indeed amused when Ned called for votes. Contrary to their usual custom each of the Merrymakers had his or her own decided idea as to what especial kind of drink should grace this bounteous repast. For Rex clamored so persistently for strawberry pop, the others were just as much determined that his selfishness should be punished; yet he was no more obdurate than Carl, who fought desperately for ginger ale, or Mrs. Fortune, who made the situation funnier by imitating Rex's piping voice as she dutifully stood up for hot tea. As for Jack Gore, he wanted strong coffee and plenty of it.

"We can't agree," said Ned, covering the steak with melting onions. "Now let's not lose any time, for Jack and I have to go back to work. What shall we do?"

"Strike a compromise," shouted Rex, as jubilantly as if compromises were very delightful things to strike.

"Right," said Ned. "Now suppose we each want some certain drink for a great event like this, and we can't agree as to what it shall be — what kind of a compromise would you suggest?"

"There's nothing in the world but cold water," said Jean ruefully.

"That's it — we gotta drink water," cheerfully recommended Rex, evidently satisfied to relinquish strawberry pop, inasmuch as nobody else had any advantage over him.

"Cold water shall be the beverage for this solemn occasion," dryly bantered Jack Gore. "And it suits me very well; I've drunk so much of this Lake Michigan water, I'm getting attached to it."

"But Aunt Esther shall have her hot tea," said Ned leniently. "This is her own house, and she's accustomed to having just what she craves."

"I'll take cold water with the rest of you," was Mrs. Fortune's very firm retort. "I'd feel contemptible drinking tea, all the while knowing that little Rex was denying himself strawberry pop. Now I'll get the water ready. At least I can contribute that much to the feast."

So with much hilarity and with frequent endorsements of cold water as the only suitable drink for a beeksteak dinner in hot weather, the viands were soon placed on the table. Jack Gore added to the feast by contributing a few baked potatoes — hot as the month of June itself, and Mrs. Fortune, after considerable searching of her pantry shelves, came in with a glass of apple jelly and a jar of chow-chow. Consequently, this bohemian spread,

outside of the rather pungent smell of the onions, was one not to be scorned by any healthy appetite.

"What has the family been doing to-day?" inquired Ned, after he had filled the plates of the diners.

"We went over to Andover, the suburb where I used to live," enlightened his aunt. "I still keep up my membership in the church there. The third ward is going to give some kind of an entertainment next Thursday; the proceeds will go towards completing repairs on the parsonage. We still have two hundred dollars to raise."

"That isn't much," said Jack Gore.

"It's a large amount when you stop to consider that most people don't feel able to squander more than a quarter apiece on a church entertainment," said Mrs. Fortune. "Our committee met to-day; we hadn't much time to plan this affair, and we didn't know what to do. We wanted to have something novel — something that would lead to sociability, and at the same time net us as much money as possible. Above all, we wanted to please everybody."

"You'll find it impossible to please everybody, considering that a third of the people don't want to be pleased," derided Jack Gore. "Any affair

that pleases everybody — or any person that pleases everybody — would hardly stand the test of discriminating critics."

"At any rate, we want to raise this money," went on Mrs. Fortune. "We are anxious for our ward to give an entertainment that will make the other two wards proud and envious of us at the same time. So I took Carl along with me to make suggestions. And I thought the other children might as well go, too, and enjoy themselves in Mrs. Fassett's lovely grounds."

"And we had the grandest time," gushed Jean, her eyes shining with reminiscences of that delightful place. "They have a beautiful pergola and a round frog-pond; and they served lemonade with peppermints floating on the top — and little cakes with pink frosting. And they have a darling little Pekinese dog and a dozen marble bird-baths —"

"And some peacocks and a croquet set that hasn't got the stripes all worn off, like ours at home," interrupted Rex.

"And the most ideal house," chanted Marje with equal gusto. "It's one of the old-fashioned kind, with a hall in the middle and four big square rooms on each side of it. And there's another hall just like it, on the second floor."

"And there are big fireplaces at the end of the halls," began Jean.

"For mercy sake, darling, don't mention fireplaces," humorously begged Jack Gore, again reminded that his collar was no more than a much-wilted bandage.

"And there's a cupola — and a rooster on the cupola that turns around and squeaks," impulsively added Rex.

"Now don't all talk at once," gently rebuked Ned. "It seems that Aunt Esther was speaking when you all broke in."

"I was trying to say," persisted Mrs. Fortune, "that I took Carl along, so he could give our committee some suggestions. He always has so many bright ideas."

"And was he of any help to you?" inquired Ned.

"He said he could be of assistance, but none of us knows what he expects to do," returned Mrs. Fortune with a dubious look at Carl.

"I have a plan that will be a winner," said Carl confidently — so confidently that his aunt's faith in him was completely restored. "I'm not going to tell you about it now; I want to think over it a little

more. Then I'll explain it to you, and you can all put on the finishing touches."

"We'll arbitrate over it," chimed in Rex with exceeding pleasantness.

"No; we'll just talk it over," said Carl. "I promised to be responsible for the entertainment, and I expect to manage it myself. Then if I fail, the rest of you can't be blamed."

"But you can't fail," bolstered Jean. "When we get a good foundation and all work together, we never fail."

"In the first place," Carl resumed, "I'm going to see that the men and boys of the church do all the work. They shall have credit for all they do. And Aunt Esther is going to loan me her car, and I'm to visit each of them to-morrow. Not one of them dares to back down unless he takes ill suddenly. Then on the next day, I'm going out to Andover again, and take Marje and Jean along to help me. It's a big undertaking, but I can pull it through — only I wish I had more time."

"Do tell us your plans," coaxed Marje. Every ear was turned to hear Carl's reply.

"I'm not ready to tell," he said gazing out over the tree-tops as if he were eager to find considerable

space in which to think. "I have some good ideas —"

"Splendid!" cried Marje, while Jean and Rex clapped their hands and all the other guests seemed equally as much pleased. "You're a wonder, Carl. And you'll succeed — you always do."

"But you all helped me," was Carl's magnanimous confession. "I thought and thought over it till my head ached, and that fat woman talked so much I seemed to get more and more rattled. Finally I got an inspiration when I recalled some things Marje, Jean, and Rex had said."

The three members of the family thus honored gazed at one another in surprise. "You remember," proceeded Carl, "how all of you kept making remarks about the Fassett home; and when Marje said that it was much like the castles we used to read about in our fairy stories, I got the great idea."

"Keep it to yourself, Carl, till you have a good foundation to build on," advised Ned. "When you get the main structure of your grand idea completed, call on the family and we'll talk over the furnishings. Isn't that right, children?"

The others enthusiastically agreed that Ned and Carl were right in keeping the plan secret till Carl

was ready to explain it; nevertheless, they were curious and equally eager to lend their assistance.

"I have great faith in Carl," said Ned with pride. "He's always in earnest, and he doesn't shirk duties, even though he makes a bungle once in a while."

"Yes, he's all right," endorsed Jack Gore. "It was very neat, the way he tackled those hidden politicians yesterday, so we could find them and drag them forth to publicity."

"But I made a great many silly mistakes," protested Carl, coloring at the recollection of his many dilemmas. "Now I'll tell you all the trouble Gath and I had to encounter before we got through with it. I thought I had made a failure all round —"

"Don't stop to apologize for yourself," cautioned Ned with one of his most engaging smiles. "All newspaper reporters have their troubles; there's nothing easy about their little game. But all the clumsy things they do seem to be of help to them in the future. At any rate, you found out the dens of those three elusory politicians — after Jack and I had failed."

"But Gath and Miss Caldwell helped me," insisted Carl with increasing modesty.

"They wouldn't have helped you if you hadn't been all right yourself," avowed Jack Gore.

Then the talkative beefsteak party was interrupted by a loud ring at the door-bell and the horrified exclamation of Aunt Esther. "Callers!" she cried, turning pale and staggering to her feet. "The idea of calling at such an hour! Oh, what shall we do!"

"I'd advise some courageous member of the family to go to the door," chuckled Jack Gore, refusing to rise till his plate was cleared.

There was something so comical about Mrs. Fortune's distress that Ned permitted his brothers and sisters to laugh, while he threw the French windows open wider and drew the tapestry separating the dining-room from the library hall.

"Brace up, Aunt Esther," comforted Carl. "Just tell the caller you're entertaining some country relatives from Pennsylvania."

Buoyed by the facetious remarks of the young folks, Mrs. Fortune succeeded in dragging herself to the front door. Then followed an interval of silence. Marje hoped that some grocerman had mistaken the front door for the one at the back of the house. In truth, all the guests at that depleted table were hoping for the best when they heard Mrs.

Fortune cry out in a frightened voice — "Dr. Vane!"

"It's Aunt Esther's preacher," shouted Jean, so loudly Marje forgot herself to the extent of uttering a still more noticeable "Hush!"

"He's come to fire Aunt Esther out of the church for eatin' onions," prophesied Rex; which remark had no effect in restoring quiet to the distracted dining-room. To make the situation all the more absurd, Aunt Esther could be heard laughing in a hysterical manner that did not go well with her dignity as a prominent pillar of the church.

Loyal to the head of the household whatever might befall, however, the guests at the table drifted into the drawing-room when Aunt Esther had summoned strength to turn on a light or two. There in the easiest chair sat a tall man with very blue eyes and the reddest whiskers imaginable. He was that kind of man that all children love — also, all old people that do not outgrow the days of their youth — the kind of man that dogs fall upon with gladness, instinctively knowing that he is to be trusted; he was one who could set a canary bird to singing with the music of his voice; or cause a cat to purr with rapture, or calm the ruffled spirit of the chronic grouch. Instead of being garbed in

black, he wore a golf suit, and his thick calves bulged out thicker in their brown-woolen casements.

"Well, what a treat!" he cried joyously. For by this time they were all introducing themselves, their kind hostess being unable to rise to that emergency. Indeed, she had sunk back in the warmest chair and looked as if she would never gain sufficient strength to get out of it. "I didn't know I was to have such a pleasure," went on Dr. Vane, lifting Rex to his knees and smiling genially at Marje. "Here we have the ideal American family of boys and girls — the family upon which the whole superstructure of our commonwealth depends! Surely this meeting has added a year to my life!"

So far as the younger members of the household were concerned, the high tension was removed by this wholesome eulogy, despite the fact that Jean had spilt a tumbler of water over the upper part of her body, thereby causing her dress to cling unnecessarily close to her spare form. But Marje felt keenly for Aunt Esther in her predicament, notwithstanding that the girl soon saw the advantage of contributing the essential womanly repose, without which any mixed crowd is sure to be lacking in tone; so she swallowed her own confusion and

sat down to keep the conversation from sounding so strained and unnatural.

"It happened that I was out riding with a friend, along Grand Boulevard," the minister explained in good time. "After I work all day to get a sermon in order for my congregation, I feel like taking good, brisk exercise. Usually, I walk — sometimes run when there is no danger of my flock seeing me; but to-night I had a chance to ride. Well, right at Thirty-fifth Street, a tire burst — and there we stuck! We had to be towed to the nearest garage, for the machine refused to work any more, and I didn't blame it. When told that it would take an hour for the necessary repairs, I happened to think of my good parishioner, Mrs. Fortune; so I made up my mind to call on her — possibly stay till the tire and other defects were remedied."

"You're welcome," volunteered Ned, heroically striving to add as much coziness as possible to his aunt's elegant but onion-smelling apartment. "Mr. Gore and I are newspaper correspondents from New York; we've been doing the big Convention down town. You see, it's all our fault — Aunt Esther and the children were out riding, so Mr. Gore and I thought it would be fun to have supper ready when they got back. We — I decided that nothing would

be so appropriate as a beefsteak smothered with onions. Of course, Aunt Esther would have disapproved, but —"

"Beefsteak and onions!" cried Mrs. Fortune's pastor. "If there's anything on earth I thoroughly approve of, it's beefsteak and onions! We never have such a treat at home, on account of callers; people are so apt to talk, you know." Then the minister gazed longingly at the portière separating the dining-room from the hall-library as he added as though inspired: "Do you really mean to say you've been having beefsteak and onions?"

"Can there be any doubt of it?" counter-questioned Ned. "Can't you smell?"

"No, dear boy — but I wish I could," solemnly returned Dr. Vane, looking disappointed. "The truth is, I haven't the sense of smell. That's a gift that's always been denied me. If I had to sleep in a bed of onions, I shouldn't be able to enjoy their sweet fragrance. Sometimes, I'm glad I can't smell; it seems that my wife gets more agony out of smelling than she does rapture. Perhaps that is why your aunt looks so distressed — she doesn't like the smell of onions. But though my sense of smell is lacking, I assure you that my

sense of taste is well developed — and I'm rather hungry."

"We'll be glad to give you what's left of the steak," essayed Carl. "I'm sure you'll like it."

The minister rose with alacrity and looked so contented everybody reflected his condition. But Ned, who had served the plates, was forced to furnish fuel for another embarrassment. "I'm sorry — very sorry," he stammered; "but Jack Gore ate the last bit of steak, though he really didn't need it —"

"And I sopped out the onion platter with a piece of bread," finished Rex.

This new aspect was still more disconcerting to Mrs. Fortune; for no hostess can bear to turn her pastor out of the house after he actually admits that he wants food. It was high time for the Merrymakers to rack their resourceful brains for some graceful means of relieving their aunt's anxiety, and at the same time prove to Dr. Vane that they were indeed good fellows. But on this occasion Ned seemed barren of suggestions. In fact, he and Jack Gore were basely deserting their posts as they began looking for their hats, all the time explaining that they must hurry back to the Convention. Carl tried to think out some plausible

remedy, but finally turned a beseeching eye upon Marje.

"You must stay and have a bit of supper," said Marje, hoping that her invitation sounded cordial in spite of its queer wording. "I'll see that it's served to you and Aunt Esther before your motor calls for you. You see, Aunt Esther doesn't entirely approve of onions — so she ate a very light meal. We have some lamb chops and some potatoes ready to fry — and it won't take long. I'll run out and give the order."

"Thank you," returned the pastor with a roguish smile. "But please don't go to any bother. It's too bad to compel the cook to prepare two suppers on such a hot night."

"She'll be glad to do it," brightly assured Marje, getting ready to disappear behind the portière concealing the topsy-turvey dining-room. "And what would you like to drink?"

"Tea, if you please," said Dr. Vane.

"Yes, dear — tea," feebly seconded Aunt Esther. "Make it hot — and very, very strong."

CHAPTER V

AT THE BIG DEPARTMENT STORES

CARL was standing under the dome of the greatest department store in the world. Above him rose several galleries, each supported by square white pillars, and over all was that wonderful dome with its perfect arches and brilliant colors. He had heard that if this dome were spread out flat, it would cover six thousand square yards; also, that a million pieces of glass formed its exquisite patterns.

Carl gazed upward with the keen eyes of one accustomed to noting details. Little cared he if the shoppers all about him should choose to regard him as a very green boy unaccustomed to seeing unusual sights. He wanted to be able to give an excellent description of this marvelous piece of work to Bess; moreover, he might be tempted to make it the subject of a composition, to be read some Friday afternoon at school. Surely this dome was fully as impressive as the "Fountain of the Great Lakes," standing in front of one of Chicago's public buildings, or the bronze image of Lincoln in the vast park

bearing his name, or any of the unrivaled paintings adorning the walls of the Art Institute. He considered it a proof of the city's artistic progress that its greatest commercial center should be covered by a dome that had called forth the world's most efficient genius.

Then he walked about, inspecting this department store, at that hour in possession of the afternoon shoppers. At five o'clock he was to meet Jack Gore and Ned at the Coliseum, to take dinner with them down town; so he had ample time in which to see more of that Wonder City, which frightens some strangers but fascinates others taking the time to get acquainted with her. But Carl soon found it an impossibility to see everything in three short hours, especially when he learned that this building contained thirty-five acres of floor space. No wonder he was already beginning to feel fatigued, or that the endless displays of rich merchandise and the countless rows of pillars made him dizzy. For these department stores are cities in themselves, supplied with restaurants and tea-rooms, detectives and physicians, hospitals with trained nurses, and all the other essentials required by an up-to-date municipality. So he decided that he would visit one of the heads of this vast emporium, and get some

information that might be of interest to himself and his family. Such a task would take no more exertion than locating three famous politicians trying to hide, nor would it require half so much courage.

He first asked a floor-walker where the business offices were located. Then in an elevator he soared to that far-away territory, soon finding himself on an upper floor gazing at an interminable row of doors. The mysterious alley in which he was standing reminded him of a city street re-echoing with the distant whirring of trolley-cars — not to mention the nearer confusion of typewriters, adding-machines, telephones, speaking-tubes, cash-carriers, and several other mechanical devices of which he had never heard. Girls in black dresses and boys in uniforms, also a host of men with manuscripts and merchandise, were hastening hither and thither, as though they had but one more moment to live and must make the most of that brief period.

"May I see the boss?" Carl asked a man, who was coming out of one of the compartments bearing a tray of babies' shoes. He knew that in order to get what he wanted, he must follow Ned's advice: "Get a line on what you are looking for; then follow it up, and don't stop till you get it."

"I suppose you wish to see the person that hires the employees," said the man, who happened to be one of the department managers. He had not laughed when Carl referred to the chief of that great store as "the boss"; possibly the man himself used that term, for the reason that it was short, expressive, and truthful.

"No; I want to see the man at the very head of this establishment," went on Carl, too much intent upon getting what he wanted, to care how his explanation sounded.

"He's dead," announced the department manager. Carl thought, from the way the man spoke, the founder of that great concern must have been dead a long time.

"But he couldn't very well be managing this store if he's dead," Carl burst forth rather indignantly; for if there were anything he hated, it was to be ridiculed when he asked a sensible question. "I want to see the man highest up — do you understand? Not the man on the top floor, but the Big Chief."

"I see," returned the man with the baby-shoes, though he did not smile; he was far too busy to waste time and strength in smiling. "You want to see the head of the wholesale and retail depart-

ments; but I doubt if you can get at him. You might as well try to see the Sultan of Turkey when he's having a family re-union. You don't want much, do you?"

"Not much," replied Carl pleasantly — but, oh, so decidedly! The Big Chief was not going to evade him if he could help it — especially after all that experience he had gone through in locating those hidden politicians.

"He's in that room at the corner," informed the man, pointing the direction. "You've got to wait in line till he gets ready to see you. And you'll have to be mighty brief in stating your business."

Carl was not daunted, though his heart fluttered rather noticeably — a physical discomfort apt to besiege a very determined person with some particle of modesty to his credit. Fortunately, no one was waiting in line; so he knocked at the oaken door — very lightly at first, then louder. A girl admitted him into a large apartment; several other girls were siting at tables and desks, or standing to look through filing-cabinets. Behind a large desk near a window gleamed the top of a human head; evidently it was the property of a man about fifty. When Carl discovered that this head was partially

thatched with short, gray hair, neatly brushed and parted at the side, he felt his fears diminishing. Apparently the Big Chief was immaculate in appearance; he also must possess a sense of fitness and an eye for estimating values, else he would not be head of the greatest department store in the world.

Contrary to the boy's expectation, the girls did not rush at him and attempt to block his way, as do the men guarding the President of the United States when some enthusiastic admirer attempts to shake hands with him in public. Instead, they stared at him, though they were too busy to stare long. Carl made his way to the Big Chief, who was bending over a mammoth pile of unanswered letters; Carl's heart crinkled with sympathy. He saw that the man was genteel in appearance — of that spruce and grayish type that causes a boy to feel it is no hardship to grow old — and that he wore a suit of gray clothes, a waistcoat of a lighter shade, and a heavy ring of plain gold.

"If you please, sir," began Carl, "I know how busy you are; but I'd like to speak a few words with you. I have considerable time, so I'll wait till you're ready."

"I never have any leisure," replied the man, though he took time to look with some interest at

the boy standing by his side. Carl found that all General Managers never have any leisure time, especially when they are beset with visitors they do not care to meet. "What's on your mind?" continued the Big Chief, not unkindly.

"I'm just visiting in Chicago," began Carl rather inadequately. "My brother is a New York newspaper correspondent at the Convention, and I'm helping him once in a while — doing interviews and such things. But I don't intend to publish anything you may be kind enough to say to me. I just want it for my own information, and for some of the boys I know. You'll be very kind if you'll answer a few questions."

"Proceed." The face of the man softened considerably; he was both amused and curious as he leaned back in his chair.

"Is it true," began Carl, "that seven-tenths of the boys that make good in big department stores come from the country? Do they have to know how to chop wood, shuck corn, and milk cows — and all those things — before they can learn how to handle merchandise?"

The great boss laughed. "I suppose you're a country boy," he said.

"Not exactly; I came from Johnstown. Of

course, it's not as big as Chicago; yet you haven't more than two cities in Illinois any larger."

"No; a boy doesn't necessarily have to be born in the country to make a success of any business," assured the great manager with the confidence of some reliable authority. "However, I'll have to admit that, here in the West, about seven out of ten of them come from the country and small towns. I think it's because a boy leaving home feels that he has to make a go of it in new surroundings. He takes hold better and has more endurance than if he stays at home."

"But I should think a city department store would seem so strange to him, he'd have a hard time getting used to it," argued Carl, taking the vacant chair facing the manager.

"He feels strange at first, of course; sometimes he's like a wild turkey lost in the forest. But it doesn't take him long to get his bearings — that is, if he has the right kind of stuff in him." The manager seemed sure of his statements, judging from the way he slapped his ferule on the desk for emphasis. "You see, the department store is not entirely a city institution. In fact, it had its origin in a cross-roads store — a country market where everything was sold, from a cook-stove down to a

paper of hair-pins; and the post-office stood in one corner of it — right over a vinegar barrel. Some say Mr. Macy of New York evolved the idea of the city department store; others say it was Mr. Stewart of the same city; still others declare it was Mr. Schoolbred of London. At any rate, it undoubtedly was one of the three."

Carl made a note of this statistic on the pad Jack Gore had given him. "I'm very much obliged to you," he said, not knowing just how to continue the interview.

"Are you looking for a job?" inquired the speaker.

"Not now; I have two more years in high school. By the end of that time, I'll know just what I mean to do; I'm looking the ground over a little. I'm so anxious to start right, so I shan't have to be changing positions so much, as some folks do."

"Good idea," approved the man. "Cultivate your judgment, be willing to work hard, watch every opportunity to do more than you are paid for doing, and never look at a clock during business hours unless you're a time-keeper."

Carl, extremely grateful for such advice, was about to tender more thanks when the speaker resumed; "Always respect your elders, and be will-

ing to put yourself under authority. Nine out of ten boys failing to get ahead are either 'Smart Alecks' or else 'Dead Ones.' Strike a happy medium."

Carl, upon seeing that the chief manager was again interested in his increasing pile of unanswered letters, thanked him cordially for his advice and information, and went out in quest of more knowledge. During the remainder of the afternoon he visited other department stores and learned many more facts, among which was included the assurance that underneath that great city is a tunnel sixty miles in length; in truth, he was informed that it is a great system of tunnels crossing one another and illuminated by electric lights. By this plan much freight is conveyed from the railway terminals to the basements and sub-basements of the great structures in the business section, thereby sparing the streets of Chicago from a state of congestion almost too complex to imagine. In this respect that city differs from New York, inasmuch as the Windy City seeks to keep the bulk of her freight under ground and her people on the surface; while most of the people living in the metropolis ride in tunnels to escape the freight traffic overhead.

Carl also gleaned many other statistics, chief

of which was the information that one of the largest department stores in Chicago has aisles of prodigious length — some of them four hundred feet long, with over fifty miles of "running carpet." In most cases the men he interviewed were civil — barring one or two, perhaps, who presumably had lunched in less time than it takes a duck to drink. The grouchiest of these, who happened to be in one of the less important establishments, told him to "skiddoo"; so he promptly fled, the while feeling compassion for such a cross man's subordinates — not to mention his wife and children.

But it was not till the following morning that Carl had the opportunity of telling his brothers and sisters about his interview with the leading department store managers. They were sitting at breakfast, above the dust, heat, and noise of the Boulevard; a breeze sweeping into the low French-windows was keeping the curtains in constant motion, like the sails of a pleasure yacht. Everything was pointing to another delightful day in which each of the Merrymakers was to do much as he pleased.

"I had a wonderful afternoon, yesterday," he began. "I go to Andover every morning, to get

ready for that church entertainment to be given by the third ward, and in the afternoon I visit the business section of the city and find out all I can about it. But it would take a year to get much of an idea about Chicago. You see, she's the center of almost everything — the grain and stock markets, of manufacturing and shipping, and some day she's bound to be the great publishing center. She also has the largest department stores and mail-order houses in the world. I've found out many things encouraging to a boy with my bent of mind. For one thing, everybody seems to have a chance to make good here if he only has the gumption to find his place. Why, Marje, I found that the president of one of these department stores was once an errand boy! He says he owes his success to the fact that he knew how to be prompt — never was late in his life, especially when there was a good opportunity in sight. Another of these men — a person with nice eyes and an honest bald head — rose from the ranks of a cash boy. He learned everything there was to know about a department store — kept his eyes open every minute. Then I met a general manager who began life as an apprentice boy; he had to work the first two years without a cent of pay."

"Is there any chance for girls?" asked Marje, rather jealously.

"Indeed there is," assured Carl. "I have the name of a girl on Lower State Street who did seventy-five thousand dollars' worth of business on a capital of ten thousand dollars, last year; she sells veiling and neck-wear. Then there's a woman glove-buyer who takes trips to New York and spends considerable time abroad; she gets a big salary and travels first-class. She didn't know a thing about gloves when she started in, except that they are used to cover hands. Another young woman runs a restaurant for a big department store. It takes four hundred people to do the work, and she has to hire and oversee all of them. Some of her waitresses make more money than the floor-walkers downstairs. Then there's the head of a dress-making department that earns a salary of twenty thousand a year."

"I'm surprised to know that there are such possibilities in the commercial world," remarked Mrs. Fortune, who had been under the impression that all clerks were under-paid and rather wretched.

"And a boy doesn't have to be born in the country in order to succeed," continued the lad jubilantly. "Perhaps some of the most successful

ones come from the country; but I found two general managers who prefer to hire clerks from small towns, and another who is looking for city-bred help. I also found one who is partial to college graduates, while still another thinks high-school graduates good enough. So there seems to be places for everybody that has some sort of education."

"I'd like to be one of the big buyers," said Rex, though, to tell the truth, he had no idea of what a buyer was expected to do outside of drawing his pay.

"So should I," said Carl. "Next to the heads of the firm, and the managers and superintendents, the buyers usually get the best salaries. There are several of them getting their twenty thousand a year; but they have to work for it. Most of the wide-awake clerks are anxious to develop into buyers. You see, the buyer has to watch all the stock in his own department, and see that it's sold out before it has a chance to get old and shop-worn. He also gets up the big bargain sales women like to attend. Some of the buyers are abroad most of the time; they scour the world for the beautiful carpets, fabrics, and other merchandise rich people want."

"You might try the mercantile business, Carl,"

suggested Marje. "One journalist in a family is enough. Mr. Pepper says you're a very good clerk; he always likes to have you in his dry-goods store on Saturdays or during the holidays."

"I may decide to stay with Mr. Pepper after I finish school," replied Carl; "but it seems more probable that I shall come right to Chicago and start at the bottom. I learned to-day that the general manager of the greatest department store was born in a Maine village, and that he was glad to get a job at a ribbon counter when he came to this city. I also found that three other managers started as news-boys or roustabouts; in fact, general roustabouts stand a good show of being general managers. The owner of one of the largest stores is a woman; she started as a cash-girl and worked up — just like a boy. She showed such a business head, they couldn't promote her fast enough. Now she's retired."

"Let 's not talk shop any more," interrupted Ned, fearing that Carl's greed for making money was interfering with his vacation. "Of course, we all want to get ahead; but there are more desirable things in the world than money."

"Yet it's nice for the children to have ideals, and talk about them. There's no telling what they

may accomplish if they keep up their ambition." Indeed Aunt Esther had been edified by the conversation, and was beginning to feel that, though she had lived in Chicago most of her life, her visiting relatives were ahead of her in grasping its best points.

"I don't envy any of the general managers," went on Carl, as yet loath to change the subject, "but I always like to see worthy people succeed. And it makes me feel that I ought to do something worth while, too. Only yesterday, I heard of a seventeen-year-old office boy at three dollars a week jumping into the job of record keeper for one of the large stores, at a big salary; also of a young woman — a frail little thing that has to support her mother — who makes several thousand a year, just because she knows how to sell laces; and an advertising man — who had to learn to spell *cat* with the rest of us — now drawing twenty-five thousand a year."

"Just imagine our Carl talking with the head of the biggest department store in the world!" cried Jean, bubbling over with admiration. "The poor man must have at least a couple of hundred people to boss — hasn't he, Carl?"

"Humph," grunted Carl; "I saw the records.

Of course, more people are employed during the holidays, and the list keeps growing steadily every day, but that man, at this very minute, has nearly sixteen thousand employees under him."

Though this truthful narrative relating to a boy's visit among some of Chicago's leading department stores may not be of much interest to girl readers — who much rather would like to know what Marje and Jean were doing at that time — it may go to show that at this time in his life Carl was bent upon finding out his future vocation; and no one was more interested in this important step than Marje and Jean, to say nothing of the many people they claimed as friends. Consequently, it may prove entertaining to go still further with Carl in his pursuit of knowledge through the marts of that great business center — particularly for the reason that something came of this expedition that was of vital import to Marje.

Among other things Carl had admired the beautiful displays to be seen in the windows of all the large stores. He made up his mind that window designers, or "trimmers," as they were called back home, should be regarded as artists — and very important ones at that, inasmuch as they not only had

the knack of combining prosaic household articles into most attractive groups, but they were educators of poor people who had the privilege of gazing in at these windows whether or not they had the money to buy.

It was hard for him to find the mysterious head window-decorators in these leading department stores; yet he managed to locate five of them in most unexpected places. Though busily working, they all proved to be courteous men, and sufficiently curious to engage in prolonged conversations; however, a few of them laughed at his queries and agreed with him that he had much to learn concerning the commercial and artistic world.

The last decorator to be interviewed gave Carl more information than all the others together. He was on the topmost floor of his establishment — sitting in a corner that resembled the wing back of a stage during the performance of a stirring extravaganza. His sleeves were rolled up, and his good-natured face and yellow hair were covered with muslin snow-flakes and splotched with green paint.

"So you want to know some of my secrets about window-trimming?" chuckled this decorator, whose name was Smith. "Like everybody else that

"'SO YOU WANT TO KNOW SOME OF MY SECRETS?'"

doesn't know anything about it, I suppose you think it's an easy thing to learn. But let me tell you, young man, you've got to work day and night to get ahead in this game. You not only have to know how to handle merchandise, but you have to know art and literature as well; and you have to use common sense or you'll slip your trolley. I've suffered the persecutions of Job, only I've kept so busy I haven't had time to feel them very keenly. I —"

"Say, Mr. Smith, I have a dozen stunning hats just in from Paris; I hope you'll see that they get the best window," called a woman in a black dress. She had suddenly sprung into view from behind a screen decorated with trailing vines and gold angels on a red background. "I have 'em all ready; so send down a man right away."

"I'll look 'em over," cheerfully agreed Smith. "But I must be sure they match the gowns I'm going to put in. I shall —"

"Say, Smith, can't we have a special window to-day?" called out a man with a bristling mustache; he had appeared from another source and was equally as enthusiastic as the woman with the Paris hats.

"Yes, I'll try," returned Smith, perfectly self-

possessed; "and here comes McCarthy to refresh my mind about those sweaters. How I hate to bother with sweaters — especially on a hot day! I'll be down soon, McCarthy." Then Smith called out loudly to one of his apprentices: "Say, Bobby, please bar the doors; don't let any more people in here unless it's one of the Great Potentates. They're getting on my nerves terribly." After which instructions he turned merrily to Carl and continued: "You see, everybody likes to dictate to a window-decorator. Why, if I'd permit it, they'd put all their stock right in the windows! But I'm not so foolish as to permit that; I believe the less a window contains, the more effective it is, and the more likely to sell goods."

"You have such immense show-windows here in Chicago," said Carl. "Some of them are almost as large as the New York shops themselves."

"Largest in the world," boasted Smith, stretching himself for the comfortable chat, which was the first he had enjoyed that day. "Our windows in this store cover a floor space of 3,200 square feet. And when a window has to be changed in a twinkling, it takes a regiment of us to do it, and to trim up another one. It keeps me planning night and day."

"Why do so many department stores display furs at this time?" aked Carl. "It's so hot I should think it would cripple the fur business."

"The biggest fur displays are on in August," enlightened Smith. "Most of the best dressers prefer to buy their furs in hot weather. Folks that have money like to buy early, before things get picked over. In January we have our white sales, and fill the windows with sheets and other cold-looking merchandise; most of the summer clothing is shown before the winter breaks up. Women as a rule like to buy early; but men wait to the last minute. That's the reason we have to hire so many extra clerks during straw-hat season."

"But Mr. Smith, how do you plan your windows?" begged Carl, more and more curious as he continued to gaze at the piles of boxes and rolls of cloth, to say nothing of shelf after shelf of cans and bottles. "First, I think it all over — weeks and weeks in advance," Smith thoughtfully replied. "I think out a new background and a color scheme. Then I make a water-color design showing how the window will look — that is, how the background and the floor of the window will look when it is completed. Some window decorators make sketches on a blackboard; but I find water-colors best. Then I

show the sketch to the heads of the firm. They criticize it and make suggestions. Finally I have to go to a dozen or more fixture houses and to as many florists and many other concerns to find out how much my materials will cost."

"What a task!" exclaimed Carl. He was about to ask another question when an old lady wearing purple spectacles appeared from still another source and came straight to Mr. Smith, who made an effort to get into his coat.

"Pardon me — but are you the head window-trimmer?" inquired the woman.

"Yes, I'm the window designer," affably returned Smith.

"Well, I'm representing one of the local leagues organized to prevent cruelty to animals," explained the dame, her countenance growing stern.

Smith stared at her in surprise. To his knowledge he had never been cruel to any animal, not even to his assistants.

"I observe," she went on heroically, "that you have Italian gardens in your windows on the west side — and they're very pretty, too — quite educational. But the poor little goldfish! Are they properly nourished — and do you have the water

changed every day? I was appointed to investigate this matter."

"That's all right, madam; you're the sixth person to call round and take an interest in my pet goldfish," said Smith naïvely. "The truth is, they're nourished almost to the point of over-indulgence. And they're having a nice summer vacation in my running brooks, which is more to their liking, I fancy, than the vats they were imprisoned in at the bird-store. I leased the fish for a week. And the little things seem to enjoy my Italian gardens, judging from the way they keep leaping into the air and sprinkling the millinery. As we have to change our windows every day or so, I assure you the fish will be returned to their owner before one of them has time to die. Henry — take this lady back in the form-room and show her the fish-food; there's enough of it on hand to kill each of them ten times."

The old lady, bowing politely and uttering profuse apologies, followed a tall lad into another room, to return no more.

"Bobby, didn't I tell you not to let anybody in?" shouted Mr. Smith to his youngest apprentice.

"I didn't mean to," assured Bobby. "She

simply walked right over me. And the head of the women's neck-wear is waitin' outside, too — also the kitchen utensil man and three drummers. And both the 'phones want you quick."

"Such a life!" groaned Smith, though he answered both telephones and silenced them in one short minute. "It keeps me and my janitor and a dozen others flying around on the wings of turmoil from morning to night. It's no use for me to try to think out anything when I'm down at headquarters."

"Perhaps I'd better leave you now; you're so busy. I thank you for what you've told me," said Carl, though at the same time he sat down on a wooden chest and relaxed considerably.

"That's right — stay a while," invited Smith. "A window-decorator like any other artist is apt to get an inspiration when he least expects it. We can't do much by locking ourselves up and thinking. We must always be out where we can get suggestions. No one ever made a success in life by shutting out his fellow men. I use everybody in my business — just as an author does. They all help me. Oh — I have a tremendous idea!"

Carl was startled at this loud announcement;

surely Mr. Smith's ideas struck him hard and at most unexpected moments.

"I'm going to use the old lady that came in to inquire about what the goldfish have to eat. Bless her heart! — she came to have me arrested, but changed her mind and left me with an idea."

"Was she an inspiration to you?" skeptically inquired the lad.

"Sure. Did you notice that coral pin she wore — a little limb of coral created somewhere out in the Pacific Ocean? I only had a glance at it, but it made me think of spiræa."

"Spiræa?"

"Yes — that little fluffy flower that spreads out so beautifully, like masses of London Smoke. I'm going to use spiræa for my Fall Opening; it's never before been used for window trimming. You see, my Fall Opening must be a winner — everybody expects that. It has to be better than the one before, though my Spring Opening was a dream. I perspired drops of blood thinking it out. Actually I racked my brain till it loosened at the hinges — but there was nothing doing at first. On the very last day I had for planning it, I went out to find something that would give me a suggestion — something that would inspire my creation. I kept my

eyes open till they smarted. Didn't even miss a person that passed me, or a sausage hanging in a butcher shop. But I seemed to be stranded. Then the grand idea came — and how do you suppose I got it?"

"How?" counter-questioned Carl.

"A man knocked me down."

The boy stared incredulously, while Smith stopped to laugh, both at his visitor's queer expression of face and his own memory of that absurd incident.

"It was this way," he rattled on. "A cranky old man turned a corner suddenly, ran into me, and made me lose my footing. Instead of apologizing he seemed so frightened he could do nothing but rail at me. I suppose he had nerves. Anyhow, he asked me why I didn't look where I was going, instead of mooning around like I was taking a stroll through Fairyland. I had the idea — Fairyland! I was mad at the time; but after I'd picked myself up, I soon found that this disagreeable remark happened to be a seed — a seed that would bear fruit. With my artistic turn of mind, I nourished and tended it till it grew into a consuming inspiration. Before long I seemed to be actually walking in Fairyland. Well, you should have seen

the windows I had for the Spring Opening — all white and silver, with pergolas and trellises and urns, and lacy textures and floors that looked like Monte Carlo lawns! Everybody was wild about that display; the public congested the sidewalks till the police complained to the heads of the firm. Even the men's clothing window looked like Paradise; but the prettiest window was the one with the baby outfits. I had a dozen wax dolls dressed to the limit; each wardrobe was valued at two hundred dollars or more. You should have seen that window, with those babies reveling in that bewitching Fairyland that owed its existence to the time I got knocked down."

"You must be a real artist," said Carl, with increasing respect. "You're not one of the temperamental cranks that only imagines he is. I think you deserve much credit for the clever way you arrange your merchandise. Why, even your kitchen window looks better than most people's parlors!"

Smith laughed. "Yes; I have some reputation as a designer," he modestly admitted. "And by the way, Chicago is said to have a dozen of the best window designers in the world — and that's saying a good deal when you stop to think that

there are fifteen thousand of them in the United States alone. When we have our Spring and Fall Openings here, the leading merchants from all over the continent come to Chicago, just to see the windows."

"And what do you do with those beautiful backgrounds and fittings when the display is ended?"

"Oh, after a few days, the department stores get ready for bids. These settings are sold to firms in other cities. My last one went to some store in Boston."

"It must have been a grand display," prolonged Carl.

"Yes; but if my firm had permitted me to spend a little more money, I might have made it still better. The finest window display ever known was made by our largest department store, not so very long ago. It cost the firm a cool hundred thousand. Every window was a triumph, and most instructive to the public. All periods were represented — Greek, Pompeiian, Gothic, Italian, Empire, Art Nouveau, and the Louis epochs. It was a dream in crystal and gold. People learned there and then that the window decorator is largely responsible for teaching folks how to dress and how to fit their

homes in good taste. There's no limit to the good we shall accomplish."

"It surely is a noble profession, though I never thought about it until to-day," said Carl musingly.

"But if you ever want to learn it, you must do like all the rest of us — begin at the lowest round of the ladder and climb up," advised Smith, for the moment very serious. "When you begin to attract attention with your work, certain people will try to do everything possible to lay obstacles in your way. You'll fall down under the abuse and criticism unless your ideals are pretty high, and you keep working."

Carl was still more fascinated when Smith took him through his various work-rooms. In one of them he found several men constructing a papier-mâché Santa Claus twenty feet high; Smith said it would take over four months to complete it.

"I'm already preparing for the Christmas display," he supplemented, as he pointed to a row of quaint Biedermier trees air-brushed with soft green tints and crested with oak leaves brightened by artificial snow and ice.

"I have to figure out the cost of everything I expect to use in my window decorations," iterated Smith, after several minutes spent in silent admira-

tion of his work. "I have to know exactly how many artificial oak leaves I need, the number of yards of fabrics, the number of lights and shades. I have to experiment in making frost and fire. I must be an artist, a practical business man, a mechanical expert, a student of textiles, an inventor, and experimenter, an untiring reader, and a dreamer. I also have to plan my displays in such a way as to call people's attention to the merchandise for sale instead of impressing them only with the scenery. And there's a thousand details to watch. You see, those little trees look simple; but they've already gone through the hands of several sets of workmen and are yet incomplete. They've cost a great deal of money thus far. My holiday display will require two hundred yards of felt for the window-floors, exactly 35,650 artificial leaves, and 172,800 holly-berries. The ice will require the melting of a thousand bars of glass."

"It's all wonderful — and you're wonderful!" rhapsodized Carl.

"Not at all; I'm just specialized," said Smith. "One has to be a master of his game in these days or somebody better fitted for his job will take it away from him. Now let's go into the big workroom."

It was in this busy corner of that great department store that Carl's search for information found a clue for Marje to work out; it concerned the mystery attached to the stealing of her aunt's valuable apparel. For, as Carl gazed at the women and girls making the crimson poinsettias that were to adorn Mr. Smith's windows, his eyes fell upon that very suspicious maid whom Mrs. Fortune had engaged to work for her by the day, without taking the trouble to look into her references — the maid who had left so suddenly after glimpsing that bevy of youngsters coming in from the East.

Carl only knew that she was Cora. To make sure of this, he asked Mr. Smith the name of the nice-looking girl with the mass of dark hair, and the designer unsuspiciously replied that it was Cora Parker; she was helping for three weeks, and was the handiest girl in the work-room. But Carl, having gained discretion since he had led to the arrest of B. Dolan in New York, asked no further questions. As for Smith, he was called away by the General Manager, who wanted the leather goods taken out of one of the north windows and replaced with umbrellas, rain-coats, and over-shoes. For a light drizzle had set in — one not likely to last more than two or three hours — and many of the passing

pedestrians would be interested in those timely and essential articles.

"That's part of the game," said Smith, turning to Carl to shake hands in farewell. "We just finished the leather window yesterday, and now we have to tear it up. Every time the weather changes, or the General Manager changes his mind, we have to change windows. It's nothing but change, change, change — such is life!"

CHAPTER VI

IN HALSTED STREET

"I've thought it over very carefully, and I believe I know just what to do." Indeed, Marje looked very positive as she strolled along with Carl on Grand Boulevard. Though the afternoon was so warm that the leaves on the dense trees refused to stir, Marje appeared very cool and fresh in a frock she and Bess had spent many hours in perfecting. From the serious expressions on the faces of Carl and Marje, anybody familiar with the temperaments of the Merrymaker family would have detected that some very important question was under discussion.

"I think you'd better leave it to me," Carl finally said, with the assurance of an older brother. "A girl shouldn't get mixed up in an affair that's bound to be sensational."

"But I'm already mixed up in it, and I'm going to see it through," said Marje with spirit.

"But you must remember how vexed Ned would be," protested Carl. "If there's anything he de-

tests it's a scene of any kind. Now if you'll leave it to me, I think I can work it out all right."

"No — it isn't a man's job," spoke Marje with her usual conscientiousness. "And so long as I am in the right, I shan't be afraid of consequences. Besides, I'll have to make my way in the world one of these days, and I might as well begin to get my experience now. We'll work on this case together."

"Just as you say," came back Carl, with a sigh of resignation. "But how shall we go about it?"

"We'll have to be very cool and cautious — and diplomatic," began Marje. "You see we're doing this for Aunt Esther's sake. She told me not to say a word about it — how that maid ran off with her summer furs and her antique ring and other things no ordinary thief would think of taking. She didn't want to spoil our visit by prolonging such a sensational discussion. Aunt Esther is one of the kind that believes children shouldn't do anything but enjoy themselves and leave all the worries to their elders. But I don't agree with her; we've all learned how to protect ourselves and one another. So I promised Auntie not to tell Jean or Rex — or even Ned; but your name wasn't mentioned. Now I'm glad I consulted you, for I got the information I've been wanting. What a small

world it is — especially for people who try to evade the law! I was surprised beyond words when you told me you saw Cora in that big department store — making leaves for the Christmas display."

"Yes; but at the time I didn't know she had helped herself to Aunt Esther's personal property. If I had, I'd have seen that she was arrested right there and then."

"I'm glad you didn't know it," said Marje with a nervous laugh. "You'd have made a great joke of yourself — like that time you tried to corner that house-breaker in New York. You couldn't have proved that Cora stole the things, and she'd have had you arrested for blackmail or something."

"Now don't you think we'd better tell Ned about it? He's a newspaper man and will know just what to do. We're too green to do much in the detective line, and we'll get into such deep water we can't get out alone."

"I'm not afraid," said Marje resolutely. "Ever since we missed Aunt Esther's property, I've lain awake nights trying to think out some way to get it back. Now you and I have the plan arranged, and it's no business of Ned's."

"But wasn't Aunt Esther foolish to hire a maid without looking up her references? The idea of

her placing that girl in charge of the house, and then going away for the afternoon, so Cora could rummage to heart's content! But she certainly had nerve to wait long enough to get the summer furs, too."

"Aunt Esther is above being suspicious," commented Marje, meaning to champion her aunt. "She's never taken any interest in managing her house; I dare say she's been cheated and imposed upon ever since Uncle died. Yet she's doing better every day; at any rate, she's learned that a woman must run her house from the kitchen, not the parlor."

"I didn't like the appearance of that girl," said Carl, more interested in the plan they had been perfecting than in his aunt's disposition to let events manage themselves. "The minute I set eyes on her, I knew she couldn't be trusted."

"I suspected her, too. And when she left Auntie, without giving a moment's notice — just because a few children happened in to spend ten days — I knew there was something wrong about her. The idea of anybody objecting to children!"

"Yet I suppose she couldn't be blamed; we're such a lively lot, and it's hotter than dog days," excused Carl.

"But we mustn't waste any more time talking it

over," briskly curtailed Marje. "We've started out to fight something that has interfered with the welfare of our family, and we mean to do our best to regain Aunt Esther's property. But tell me all you know about Cora. We'll have to know how to conduct our investigation."

Marje was so bent upon plunging into the details of the case in hand, Carl had no time to warn her that he had found from experience no one knows exactly what he may do or say during a serious crisis, for the reason that all such affairs are prone to yield to sudden and unexpected turns. "I saw her in the work-room of that big department store," he repeated with solemnity. "She was making leaves for a Christmas display, and she was working more capably than anybody else. She didn't lift her eyes — and she didn't know I was looking at her. But I recognized her as the girl who had hired out to Aunt Esther and then left her in the lurch. I happened to tell you last night that I had seen her. Then you told me that you suspected her of having stolen Aunt Esther's things. But why didn't you tell me about the theft sooner?"

"Because I was keeping it to myself till I could think out some suitable way to get at the case. I'm so glad you didn't tell Aunt Esther you saw

Cora. As it is, the secret is ours, and it's our place to unravel it."

"I asked her name," Carl hurried on, "and told Mr. Smith that she seemed to be very skillful. He said that she was Cora Parker, and that she had only been employed by him within the last few days. He believed she had a future. He also said if she made good, he'd see that she got the opportunity of trying out a steady position. He thought she might make a good milliner; and that when she was through making leaves for the display, he'd have the head milliner try her out in the frame department —"

"What's the frame department?"

"He meant the place where the apprentices make the bodies of the hats — that is, they're the ones that get the hats ready for the trimmers. You see, trimmers have to be experienced; it takes a knack to know how to put on ribbons, flowers, buckles, and all the other ornaments women want on their hats. If a girl turns out to be a good trimmer, they may try her out as a saleswoman. If the customers like her, she may have opportunities of advancing still further. Mr. Smith said the proprietor of one of the leading millinery stores started in as an apprentice and worked for months without pay. She kept

getting advanced, saved her money, and now has a place of her own."

"And he thinks Cora Parker has a future?" Marje was indeed amazed, though she tried to seem merely reflective.

"Yes; he says she is of an artistic nature, and she's bound to succeed if she gets started right. He declares he never had a better worker in his department."

"Well, of all things! I'm sure she'll not get very far if she's as dishonest as we think she is. Now's the time to teach her a lesson."

"It may be that she's had poor training," said Carl, with a greater display of charity. "Or it may be that she's easily tempted and can't resist the opportunity to take things that appeal to her love of the artistic; possibly, too, she needs money."

"I haven't any patience with her," warmly declared his sister, largely for the reason that she felt it her duty to look after the interests of her gentle but rather unpractical aunt. "At any rate we must see her. She may have been stealing things all her life — who knows?"

"She works on the day shift," further explained Carl. "Her hours are from seven in the morning

till four in the afternoon, with a half-hour off for lunch."

"And where does she live?"

"On Halsted Street; I have her address in my pocket." Whereupon Carl produced from his vest a slip of paper bearing the desired information, to Marje's unrelenting satisfaction.

"Do you suppose she goes right home as soon as her work is done?" queried the girl.

"I don't know. When I went back to the store this morning I asked the time-keeper for her address and he gave it to me. I did not ask him any other questions."

"I hope you didn't do anything to arouse suspicion against her," said Marje solicitously. "We'll give her every chance in the world to defend herself; I wouldn't spoil her career for anything. But I'm positive she's guilty."

"What are you going to do now?"

"We're on our way to the garage to get Aunt Esther's car," enlightened Marje, her face set and determined, as it always was when she felt herself actuated by a just but painful motive. "I asked her if we could ride till six. Aunt Esther and the little ones are taking the afternoon to have a good rest; they've been out all morning. Rex

wanted to go along with us; but I promised him if he'd stay with Auntie and not get boisterous, I'd give him a nickel when I got back."

"Rex always has to be bribed," laughed Carl. "I doubt if it's good for him."

"But we're away from home, and I believe in making the sailing as easy as possible," was his sister's reasonable explanation. "When I have such an important task ahead of me, I can't waste time in arguing with him; he's too much for me."

On this occasion, their driver seemed surprised when Marje asked to be driven to a remote number in Halsted Street; nevertheless, he complied, with his usual willingness, and was soon crossing the city to that teeming thoroughfare that has no end.

"Possibly it's miles and miles away," Carl remarked presently.

"And doubtless in a very wicked neighborhood," prophesied Marje, who already had noted that they were entering a section from which the sun seemed to be excluded by tall and dingy tenement houses. The din of street-cars and the shouts of ragamuffins playing perilously close to the tracks agitated her; but she was determined not to turn back till Cora Parker had been dealt with as she deserved. At last they reached their destination, to find them-

selves in front of a squalid frame building but two stories high. A fish market occupied the ground floor; upstairs were window-boxes containing a few red geraniums powdered with dust.

"I'm glad it's such a small building," said Marje. "It doesn't look half so frightening as one of those tall sky-scrapers."

"But you're not going in alone," insisted Carl, getting ready to ascend the steps with her.

"Yes — I prefer to go alone. Why should I be afraid when you and the chauffeur are right under the windows — and the windows are open? If anything should happen, I'll call out, and you'll be right on hand."

Carl could see no wisdom in Marje's obdurate policy, nor did she herself at the time. She only knew that she wanted to see Cora Parker alone, without any one — even her brother — to interfere. Though a very modest girl, Marje had a good opinion of her cool-headedness, and considerable distrust of Carl's impulsiveness.

Up the rickety stairs she climbed, soon finding herself awaiting an answer to her knock at a flimsy door. Then she was confronted by an elderly woman with a pale face distorted by pain and anxiety. Yet Marje divined that she was in the

presence of a mother, and that the tawdry front room in which she stood was the shrine of a peaceful home.

"Come in," invited the woman in a manner that Marje considered suspicious. Marje obeyed; she observed that the room was excessively glorified with cheap bric-a-brac, and that in one corner was a canary in a cage topped with an immense bow of red ribbon considerably soiled. There were also a few plaster casts, several cheap pictures, and a shelf of worn books and magazines. Yet, with all its tawdry furnishings, this apartment seemed to be dominated by some person with an artistic nature as yet uncultivated.

"I'm Marjorie Merrymaker," said the girl kindly, but with all the dignity she could muster. "I'm looking for a young lady named Miss Cora Parker."

"I'm her mother," announced the woman, sitting down upon a straight-backed chair and motioning Marje to a big rocker ornamented with a crocheted tidy and a silk head-rest. "I expect Cora any minute. I don't think I ever heard her speak of you."

"I don't know her so very well," returned Marje, conscious that her color was mounting high. In vain did she try to regain her serenity in that little

patch of domesticity which, in spite of its garish ornaments, must seem squalid on a rainy day. She glanced through the window, to make sure that Carl was within sound of her voice. Then she grew self-conscious. What if she should have to wait till dusk, then be compelled to return home with nothing to her credit save a mute interview with a very composed old lady? She shifted uneasily about as her eyes took in the old-fashioned bureau in the adjoining room; she wondered in which of its drawers reposed her aunt's summer furs. Undoubtedly, the antique ring and the jet pendants were by that time in possession of some pawn-broker.

"Do you like this part of town," Marje finally asked as she gazed at her reticent hostess.

"I don't mind it, so long as Cora can come home after her work," answered Mrs. Parker with characteristic caution. "Of course, we'd rather live among genteel people, but we haven't got money enough. I used to work; but my rheumatiz came on, then Cora had to earn the livin'. She's a smart girl, but she's never had much chance. She's awful fond of art; she made them paper flowers over yonder."

The woman pointed to a cheap vase containing artificial roses of all colors. Marje did not con-

sider them beautiful, but she appreciated the maker's good intentions.

"Cora's father died when she was little," went on the mother in a whining voice as she began to wax bolder. "I tried to give her a little schoolin', but it didn't amount to much; she just had to go to work. She don't take much to house-work or clerkin'— she's too fond of art. Wants to be makin' purty things all the time. She makes all her own dresses and trims her own hats. Her new boss seems to think she's got a future ahead of her — and I'm glad of it. Seems like I've been such a dead weight to her — with my rheumatiz and all."

Marje tried to change the conversation; she was beginning to lose courage for once, and was sorry that she had undertaken to corner Cora Parker. But before she could say a dozen words more, the door opened and in came the object of her quest. She wore a faded dress of some soft and dark material, and a small hat trimmed with tiny pink roses. Cora seemed surprised at seeing a visitor; Marje rather awkwardly shook hands with her.

"I don't suppose you remember me," she began rather insipidly.

"I can't place you just now," was the new-

comer's indifferent response as she took off her hat and gently placed it on the table. Then, without so much as looking at her mother, she sat down upon a puny sofa and proceeded to stare at Marje with those brazen eyes the Merrymakers had decided were untrustworthy.

"You worked a day for my aunt, Mrs. Fortune, of Grand Boulevard," floundered Marje, not wishing to sound too accusing. "You left soon after we arrived from Pennsylvania to pay her a little visit."

"Oh — I remember!" Cora was so indifferent as to yawn, though she tipped her rather bitter laugh with the retort: "I thought you had a lot of nerve to go visitin'— especially that terrible day when thirty folks dropped dead from sun-stroke."

Mrs. Parker seemed interested; she gazed straight into her daughter's face as she broke into the conversation with the words: "I didn't know you ever worked for a woman by that name, Coe. There must be some mistake about it."

"No, there ain't," declared Cora. "I worked for her a whole day and got my pay. I didn't tell you about it, Ma — but I hired out to do kitchen and house-work for a week or two, to fill in. I got so tired of the noisy factory and the fresh boss;

I wanted a change. I thought I'd lose my reason if I didn't get a change. But I left my job with that woman on the Boulevard when I found that she was goin' to put up a lot of company — all of 'em young-uns — and the weather so hot, nobody but a heathen would think of goin' visitin'."

"You left very suddenly," essayed Marje in a small voice.

"Sure I did," was the spirited confession. "I thought I could stand the work at first. But it made me mad when all you kids came stringin' in. Mind you, the woman never even told me you were comin'. She ain't got any more of a business head than a grasshopper. 'Most anybody would get panicky. It didn't take me long to jam on my hat and take to my heels."

"But you left without a minute's notice," persisted Marje.

"Whose business was that?" flared Miss Parker. "And didn't I have a right to change my mind? No more workin' in a kitchen for me. Why, I wouldn't have a minute to study art! I've had a hard time tryin' to keep employed all the time; and I've never been idle a minute. Why, I've been watchin' the 'ads' in the daily papers for three years, and acceptin' everything that comes along —

even to workin' in a kitchen for your aunt, though I don't know any more about cookin' than a jack-rabbit does about Sunday. Whenever I found a job that was easier than the one I had, I gave up the old one. You see I just had to earn money; Ma and I needed it. I've done everything from peddlin' salve down to standin' in a show-window on State Street and demonstratin' — showin' people how to close up a new kind of a foldin'-bed."

"But my aunt, Mrs. Fortune —"

"I'm square with her," squelched Cora, her fury increasing. "I worked a day, and got my dollar and a half, and spent it all to get liniment for Ma. If your aunt wants her money back, she'll have to go to law —"

"Coe, you told me that you were doin' artistic work," chided the mother in a penetrating voice.

"Well, that depends how you look at it," returned Cora, her rage temporarily subsiding. "A person has to be some artist to make a house, like that woman's on Grand Boulevard, look half-way decent. I'm mighty sure it would have took a dozen artists to make it look like anything. I worked till something snapped in my back, and I ain't been strong since."

"I suppose the house did look rather upside-

down," granted Marje. "Poor soul! — the maid she had, before you, left her in the lurch, too."

"I should think she would," came the defiant retort. "Of all the jobs she had stacked up for me to do! And she's the most squeamish woman I ever saw. Dresses like a doll, and doesn't know enough to shut a window when it rains in. She can't tell the difference between a pork-chop and a spare-rib. Anybody that would work for her ought to have a pension from the gover'ment."

"But she's improved a great deal since then," defended Marje. "It's wonderful how she's taken hold. We don't need any outside help any more, and when we leave she's going to shut up her apartment and take a trip. We've been coaxing her to go to Mackinac."

Cora was not especially interested in Mrs. Fortune's contemplated trip to Michigan; she sat curling her lip disdainfully, though her eyes rested admiringly upon her own handiwork, the faded red-and-blue-paper roses in the gaudy vase. "I have a fine new job now, and I can snap my fingers at anybody," she went on presently.

"I know it," returned Marje with exceeding coolness. "I hope you'll succeed — and you will, if you're honest."

Then she cast down her eyes and shuddered as she awaited the response. But it was evident that Cora Parker was not very subtle, nor was she sensitively suspicious. Marje's use of the word "honest" did not even produce the flicker of an eyelash; Cora simply went on irrelevantly: "When I get more money saved up, I'm goin' to take Ma out of this old pen here; we'll move into a better neighborhood. It ain't fair for some girls to have everything they want, while others have to work their fingers off to get along — and try to keep respectable — and nobody to help 'em. When a poor girl has looks, it seems that the whole world tries to get the best of her. Why, suppose I should slip — who'd care, except Ma? And who'd do a thing to help me? Not even Ma; she's too poor."

Marje made no comment. Feeling herself on questionable ground, she did not want to run the risk of inflaming Cora's temper still more, especially on such a hot day. Yet she must get to the point. "My — my aunt doesn't think you treated her right," she managed to say as she drew still closer to the open window.

"What's that?" Miss Parker's voice was thin and sharp, her eyes ablaze. "Nice thanks she gives me for tidyin' up her place — fairly ruinin' my

health to get her house straightened! Didn't I give her notice — like any lady would? Now tell me what you're gettin' at when you say your aunt thinks I didn't treat her square."

"You left her just at dinner-time —"

"You're right I did," intervened Cora, her voice trembling with indignation. "I'd have left her before — even before she came back from the station with a whole load of kids; but I needed my day's pay. So I stayed and worked till my time was up. And why should I stay and get dinner? I'm sure it was too hot for anybody to eat; I couldn't have swallowed a mouthful, even if somebody had dared me to."

"But my sister and I got the dinner," said Marje with a smile meant to disarm Cora's rage of its sting. "Fortunately we know how to cook."

"Then what you findin' fault about? Ain't life bad enough for me, without havin' you come in to make calls when I'm dead tired?"

"I don't want to make things harder for you," resumed Marje, as yet feeling nothing substantial to rest upon, "but in this world we all have to look out for our families. That's why I'm here. I came to see that justice is done to my aunt. She's not very strong, you know — and she needs my

help. I — I thought you and I could talk it over. It happens that my brother knows your employer, Mr. Smith — and Mr. Smith says you're a promising girl — and that you'll make a success in life —"

"Oh, I see what you're after!" Cora's overwhelming scorn can only be imagined. "You're a nice one — you are!" she railed, advancing towards Marje, who seemed to be getting ready to jump through the window backwards. "So you want to get even with me for leavin' your aunt! You go to work and find out my employer — and you're tryin' to make me lose my job. But let me tell you, young lady — if you lay one straw in my way, I'll make you regret it —"

"Please be calm," demanded Marje, much relieved when the older woman pulled her daughter back to the tattered sofa. Then she decided to settle the matter as expeditiously as possible, no matter how sharp Miss Parker's teeth or how long her nails. She braced herself and came back in a voice unusually imperative. "Why did you go to my aunt's house for a position? Who was your reference?"

"Why, you little infant — your aunt put an 'ad' in the newspaper!"

"'YOU'RE A NICE ONE — YOU ARE!' SHE RAILED"

Marje staggered. "I guess Auntie must have forgotten she did it," she said with a dismal laugh.

"Sure, she did," cried Cora ironically. "She told me she had a running 'ad' in all the papers. It must cost her a lot of money, and she must have a lot of trouble to keep help. But no wonder! She's as flighty as a pigeon, and she don't know a thing about business. I could have got the best of her if I'd been that kind; she ought to have a guardeen."

"I'm her guardian now," answered Marje, more confident, now that she had to be more aggressive, in order to defend her aunt. "In fact, we've all been taking an interest in Aunt Esther. And she's getting very competent, too. She isn't so forgetful as she was, and she doesn't have so many of those frightful headaches. She's really a darling; we're very fond of her —"

'I don't care a piece of bees-wax about your aunt. But if you've poisoned my boss against me —"

"Now please be quiet, Miss Parker," interrupted Marje with rising voice. In truth, she was getting ready to call to her brother. "All you need to do is to see that my aunt gets back those summer furs and that ring, and — and a few other things that came up missing."

"Cora!" shrieked the mother; she covered her face with her bony hands and began to heave convulsively.

Marje realized that her tongue had slipped; also that she had precipitated a turmoil that no girl of her years could handle gracefully, no matter how just her cause. Yet she took a firm stand and held it even when the mother cried out irefully: "I'll have you arrested — right on this spot — for slanderin' my daughter! She never stole nothin'—"

"I never heard of anything so mean," whimpered Cora as she rose from the sofa and tore herself from her mother's clutch. "The last thing I did was to straighten up your aunt's bedroom. She had her furs and all her valuables strung all over the bureau — everything helter-skelter — like some women do when they depend upon their hired help to look after 'em. I even put 'em away for her. And now she tries to make out that I stole 'em!"

"Where did you put them?" persisted Marje.

"I dumped 'em into that writin'-desk by the windah. Lifted the lid and tossed 'em in. Didn't have time to find out where they belonged."

Marje felt the shock of another great surprise; yet she was resolved to acquit herself with dignity,

and at the same time to make reparation for the agitation she had produced in that squalid home in Halsted Street. Again she observed that the consensus of opinion held by several people that a certain person is a thief does not necessarily prove true.

"I'm so relieved," she said, with another tortured laugh. "And Aunt Esther will be immensely pleased. You see, her dead husband gave her the ring, and she got those jet pendants in Rome. We were very stupid not to look in the writing-desk. But who would think of looking in a writing-desk for furs and such things? Besides, Aunt Esther never uses that desk. It's just an antique — something to look at, and take up room. I —"

"You have a lot of impudence," Cora asserted with a mocking laugh. "I'd look the whole house over — even to the insides of the salt-cellars — before I'd accuse anybody of stealin'— especially a poor workin' girl."

Even in her perturbation Marje was broad enough to see that Miss Parker was right about it. Consequently, her face reddened till it began to look that Marje was more guilty than the girl she had accused. Yet she said with sincerity no one could question: "I'm very sorry. I — I hope you'll

forgive me. You know, I didn't actually accuse you of stealing; I just asked if you knew where the things were. Won't you forgive me?"

After much sullen hesitation and a great show of injured dignity, Cora and her mother accepted Marje's hand-shakes, though both still continued to mutter threats vibrant with courts and law-suits.

"I'll make it all right with you," Marje assured them as she hurried down the stairs and into the motor-car. Never before had she been so glad to get back to Carl, or to feel that the car was in motion.

"Well, did you get Aunt Esther's things?" asked Carl, somewhat derisively.

"She said she didn't take them," was the unconvincing reply.

"It wasn't a woman's job," further persecuted Carl. "I thought you'd let her take you in. Undoubtedly she's pawned them by this time."

But Marje obstinately refused to say anything more on the subject, despite Carl's scornful ridicule, and the frequent reminder that a girl's place was at home.

When they arrived at their aunt's cozy apartment, they were met at the door by Mrs. Fortune, who seemed to be unusually vivacious. "I'm so

glad you're here, Marje," she cried. "We've been having a jubilee — Jean, Rex, and I."

Marje followed her straight to the back bedroom, where she discovered that the lid of her aunt's writing-desk had been turned down, thus revealing all the missing articles, as well as a gold lorgnette and several other articles of even greater value. "I found these things less than an hour ago," babbled Mrs. Fortune. "So you see you were wrong about Cora's suspicious-looking eyes. What is more, I found several other things I hadn't even missed. I've always been so careless and so forgetful. But I'm not going to be that way any more."

"I'm very glad — for many reasons," replied Marje, at the same time casting a restraining glance at Carl. "I knew you'd find them. Something told me you would."

"And to think we looked into every conceivable receptacle except that desk!" rapturously went on Mrs. Fortune as she kissed the antique ring and put it on her finger. "Weren't we a couple of incompetents?"

Marje agreed that they were. It was humiliating to recall the hot hours she had spent in rummaging her aunt's possessions, all the time convinced that

Cora Parker was responsible for the missing articles.

"Why didn't you let me help hunt?" inquired Jean, hurt that a robbery had been kept from her knowledge, notwithstanding that she loved excitement.

"Aunt Esther wouldn't let me," answered Marje with unusual petulance.

"We didn't want to spoil your good time, dear," explained Mrs. Fortune, giving Jean a consuming hug.

"But you should have let me in on the secret," persisted Jean, battling hard against her inclination to pout. "If we'd all worked together, we'd have found the things in no time at all. Bess says Marje is very level-headed and a good manager; but she never *could* find anything — not even if it was right under her nose."

CHAPTER VII

AN UNEXPECTED FAMILY REUNION

GATH SINGLETON spent one entire afternoon showing Carl through one of his father's clubs. Cool and luxurious was this place on a warm day; at least Carl thought so — especially while he was playing round and splashing in a marble pool. For he loved the water, and had been well trained back at the old swimming-hole near Johnstown, where on summer days a legion of boys dive into its chocolate-colored depths and think there is no sport on earth quite so satisfactory. At this marble pool of a very exclusive club, he found that the boys yelled just as lustily as those back at the old swimming-hole, and that they dived backwards from elastic planks and did as many other feats requiring confidence and physical strength; yet all the time they were being closely watched by their director — a brawny man in black trunks, and several attendants peering at them through the windows of a drying-room stacked with sheets and Turkish towels.

"I've been wanting a swim ever since I came to Chicago, and now I'm having it," Carl rejoiced, as for the moment he and Gath were sitting on the tessellated floor surrounding the pool and watching the merry bathers. "You're a lucky boy, Gath, to have the use of such a splendid club."

"I suppose so," replied Gath, not very heartily. "Father has belonged to this club since he came of age, and we youngsters have the privilege of coming in on Saturday afternoons and making ourselves at home. This club is as perfect as the best materials and all modern devices can make it; yet I'd rather go out to Wilson Beach, where everybody else goes, and jump into the Lake. The air is so much fresher there, and a person can grovel in the sand and bake in the sun. Besides, I shouldn't have to be bothered with a physical director over there. The man with the black trunks watches us as if we were so many criminals, so we won't splash too hard, or our temperatures get too high or too low. He thinks he knows it all, and that he's the only person that can swim well. He's such a big lobster that, after he takes a dive, there isn't much water left in the pool for the rest of us."

Carl looked at the physical director. He was indeed a stocky man, with a big neck and that kind

of square chin that suggests domination. At present he was taking a boy through a course that required much pulling of weights and other strenuous exercises.

"Expand your chest, sir," the director was saying. "And work harder. Take it a bit slower, and contract your muscles till they almost snap. Now boys, don't all dive at once; you'll get tangled up and I'll have to jump in and fish you out. Mr. Martin, let me take your temperature before you get into the water; you've just come out of the steam-room, and ought to cool gradually before you bathe. Better stand under a luke-warm spray for a moment."

"I don't wonder you prefer Wilson Beach," said Carl sympathetically. "It must be aggravating to have a man standing around telling you just what movements to make. But the club itself is wonderful; I think I like the rest-rooms, the library, and everything about it except the physical director."

"Now what shall we do?" went on the inexhaustible Gath. "We've bowled and played checkers, tried squash and knocked the balls around on the billiard table, jumped leather horses and hung on straps in the gymnasium, read the daily

papers and had a bath. I suggest that when we finish our plunge we have a nap."

"But I have to go home at six," said Carl rather regretfully. "Ned will be there for dinner. The poor fellow is still drudging away at that Convention. I wanted to help him, but there was nothing I could do. Aunt Esther and Rex are at Jackson Park; they expect to visit the Field Museum and Chicago University. And Marje and Jean are at a girls' party over at Prairie Avenue. I don't see any reason why I shouldn't stay down town a little later, though I promised to be back by six."

"Just be thankful you didn't have to go to the girls' party," said Gath with a shiver; he could think of nothing more disagreeable on a hot afternoon. "I suppose they'll wear their big hair-bows and play 'London Bridge.' Stupid, I call it."

"Oh, I don't know." Carl wanted to be square, notwithstanding that he did not approve of the events that make a girls' party a great success. "Marje and Jean love parties better than anything else, unless it's a family reunion."

"Now let's take another plunge and then go in for a nap," suggested Gath with a yawn.

"Let's do," consented Carl, also yawning. "That hot-room made me feel weak."

"Yes; it's enough to make anybody ill, even to think of a hot-room. Looks so silly to see a man sitting in a close room, with a wet towel on his head and his feet in a bucket."

Then they took another dip in the tepid water, after which performance they went into a drying-room where two attendants almost wore away their skins with coarse towels, wrapped them in sheets, and led them to a dark cooling-room where they placed them side by side on small cots. All was quiet save the ticking of a clock somewhere in the distance. Drowsy from the lull and his recent exertions, Carl soon fell into a deep slumber; but not till he had thought over each member of his family and wondered what they were all doing at that time.

Finally he was awakened by one of the attendants switching on a light. "Good gracious!" he cried as he sat bolt upright. "I must have slept several hours."

"Well, don't worry about that," said Gath sleepily. "It's only seven." Then he turned over and settled himself for another nap.

"But I promised to be back at Aunt Esther's by six," protested Carl, beginning to feel the remorse that always dogged any of his failures to perform a necessary duty. "Ned will be disappointed, and

they'll think something has happened to me. Hurry up — let's get dressed!"

"Don't get excited," yawned Gath. "You slept so sound I couldn't bear to wake you; so I telephoned the house that you weren't coming home for dinner."

"What!" Though Carl was trying hard to be a model guest, he rebelled against this disposition of his host to meddle with his own affairs. He jumped from the cot and began to dress. Seldom it was that Carl ever missed taking the last meal of the day with his family.

"Don't be such a molly-coddle," sneered Gath, though he laughed when he said it. "It's a queer pass when a boy of fifteen can't stay out for dinner once in a while. You're a good fellow, but you care too much about what your folks think. You haven't any more freedom than Rex has — and you know it."

Carl reflected for a moment. He wondered if Gath's accusation had truth in it; perhaps after all, he had been obeying too many dictations made by his family, considering that he was going on sixteen. He thought strict discipline very good for girls, yet it did not seem to apply to a strapping lad soon to go forth to fight the battles of life.

"I suppose when you get to be a man," taunted Gath, who evidently was reflecting Carl's thought, "you'll still be under petticoat management. I suppose you'll expect Bessie to telephone you every few minutes, to ask you how your temperature is — just like that physical director out there in the pool. And Marjie will keep on reminding you that your tie is crooked, and that you ought to leave your shoes at the front door when it's muddy. And Jean will still continue to sit on your lap and cuddle you, no matter if she gets to be a fat woman with gray hair —"

"And what about Ned?" Carl was amused at Gath's sarcastic but well-meant arraignment.

"Ned is as bad as the girls," declared Gath. "You see, he thinks he has to set wholesome examples before you, all the time — just because he's older."

"But he's so kind and indulgent; and he's been a father to me so long. I —"

"At any rate you're not going home for dinner," Gath interrupted with a show of authority. "We'll stay down town at one of the big restaurants with electric fans and have our meals served to us. I tried to show you too much Chicago today; so after a bath, you naturally needed a nap.

And now you're faint for the want of food, and must have it right away. You'll feel better when you hear the music and tackle some spaghetti and a veal cutlet browned to a turn. You need a little vacation away from that family of yours, though you don't realize it. Besides, they'll appreciate you all the more when you get back."

Carl imagined there was wisdom in Gath's advice, yet he could not easily succumb to his friend's way of thinking. It seemed that his family was bound to him by uncertain ties that might be broken at any minute, and that their sojourn together was sure to be more or less brief. Soon they would be scattered, like the leaves wafted from a bough in the chill autumn breeze. Still he wanted to take dinner in a down-town restaurant; and his desire gracefully led the way to his resignation. In truth, he grew merrier than Gath as they finished dressing.

"We'll go to a good show, too," added the tempter, by this time wide awake.

"I couldn't do that; they'd all worry," laughed Carl.

"Ridiculous!" scoffed Gath, mistaking Carl's conscientiousness for sentimentality. "You don't seem to be able to slip your apron-string control. I feel sorry for you. But I'll not insist on your

going to a theater to-night; it's too warm. Then besides, my pocket-book is too weak to stand both the dinner and a show. So we'll ride home in a taxi. My father has a charge account with the Taxi Company, and I use it on special occasions. I want you to see where I live, and look over my collections. I have everything from stamps to weapons of war — enough to stock a museum."

"Young gentlemen, how can a man sleep when you keep buzzing that way?" Both boys were startled at this plaint hurled at them from a dark corner by a deep bass voice. They had supposed themselves to be alone, only to find that another club member had been trying to take a nap before dinner.

"Let's go," grumbled Gath. "There doesn't seem to be any place in Chicago for a boy unless it's at some public play-ground. I envy your swimming-hole at Johnstown where you can yell all you please."

Carl, however, took time to apologize to the man, then followed Gath out through the office and into the street. Eager he was to get to some cool restaurant where there were jolly people and good music — to say nothing of a veal cutlet and spaghetti.

But in the meantime some unusual happenings were taking place at the home of Gath Singleton out on Drexel Boulevard. This stronghold was one of those nice old residences one finds scattered through the South Side — a dignified mansion suggesting the best traditions and the greatest regard for public opinion. As Mr. and Mrs. Singleton were away for several weeks, a part of this abode had been closed; yet a few open windows and several rugs airing on a balcony were evidence that some of the servants were still at work and at the same time enjoying their summer relaxation.

Aunt Esther Fortune was inclined to think that something terrible had happened to Carl. The past few days spent with her relatives, however, had kept her from making this fear public property; yet Rex, young as he was, knew that something heavy was on her mind. He had seen that same look on Bess's face when she was trying to keep something from Jean and him — something that might unnecessarily worry them and spoil their spirit of play. Yet he remained quiet as he and his aunt rode up to the luxurious Singleton home, where Mrs. Fortune rang the bell twice before the housekeeper appeared. She was plump and elderly, also rather severe of countenance till she saw that the caller was an esteemed

friend of the family and her charge; then she smiled broadly and invited the callers into the drawing-room. Rex noted that the windows were tightly closed, and that each piece of furniture was in a white slip as if it had just been gotten ready for bed.

"I'm sorry to bother you, Mrs. Brocker," said Aunt Esther, at first refusing to sit down. "I know the Singletons are away — but I want to see Gath."

"He left the house early this mornin', and he hasn't got back yet," answered the housekeeper. "Please sit down, lady."

Mrs. Fortune sank wearily upon a corner of the couch, and Rex doubled up beside her; Mrs. Brocker remained standing. "You see," she continued, "he had to stay in Chicago and make up a study or two he failed in; he has a tutor. He wants to enter 'prep' in the fall. His older brother is supposed to look after him, but Basil had to leave to-day for Pe-o-ry. I s'pose Gath is takin' advantage of his absence and havin' a good time; he does that once in a while. It's now six o'clock, and he hasn't 'phoned."

Mrs. Fortune, to say the least, was puzzled. A week before she might have suffered from a nervous

headache as the result of such a shock. But how could she give way when Rex's round eyes were fixed upon her in such a questioning stare? So she smiled at him disarmingly, and he began teetering up and down on the soft couch as he had seen fat people do while riding in padded motor-cars. "Gath telephoned me scarcely a half-hour ago," she went on. "I didn't have a chance to inquire; but from the way he spoke, I thought he and my nephew must be here. I came right over to see him. It's silly, I suppose; but I feel it my duty to look after my dead sister's children — especially when they're visiting me. So Rex and I rode over to take Carl home in the car."

Even then, Mrs. Brocker was not sure as to what the visitor wanted; she looked puzzled and rather ill at ease.

"Are we goin' to eat supper here, Aunt Esther?" inquired Rex in his shrillest tones. Furthermore, he acted as if any provender the motherly housekeeper might choose to provide would be very acceptable; she looked like a woman very expert in making pies and cookies.

"No, dear, we're not going to stay," said Mrs. Fortune softly, even in her stress of mind stopping long enough to repress a smile with her dainty

handkerchief. "We want to find Carl; but I don't know how we're going to do it. I think he must have forgotten that he was to come home in good time to-night; I'm sure he had no intention of staying away. I left a note for Ned; he'll find it when he gets home. I suppose I shouldn't have told him the particulars, but I learned long ago that the Merrymakers never work in the dark. And I telephoned Marje at the party and told her about it — and to go right home and look after the house till I get back. I hope she won't worry, too."

"I hope she'll get supper," said Rex, loudly enough for the housekeeper to hear and have compassion for him.

But Mrs. Brocker stood as one in a trance. She believed Mrs. Fortune was off her head; possibly she was suffering from the heat.

"I hardly know just what to do now," Mrs. Fortune went on with a helpless gesture; she gazed appealingly at the housekeeper.

"You don't s'pose Carl got run over — do you?" suggested Rex, so candidly that his aunt clapped her hands to her head and almost shrieked, just as she formerly did when some one spoke to her too suddenly, or the steam-radiator began to clank.

"Of course not, Rex," she managed to say.

"You mustn't think such terrible things. Carl is with Gath, and they'll surely be here before long — or telephone."

"I don't think nothin' bad has happened," said Mrs. Brocker, laying one hand on the pedestal occupied by a statue of Diana — a very ghostly image, in a muslin slip that permitted only the pale toes of the goddess to be exposed to view. "And I don't know what to advise you, lady, unless it's to take the little boy home and get him some supper. Gath don't bother to 'phone, when his folks are away, and sometimes he stays out late."

But before Aunt Esther could say another word, the door-bell rang and the housekeeper hurried out into the hall; presently she returned and said that two gentlemen had called for Mrs. Fortune.

Aunt Esther uttered a cry of relief when she saw Ned coming into the room. He was followed by a very hot, tired, and hungry-looking Jack Gore. "I'm so glad you came, Ned!" she cried, "though I really didn't want you to be worried. But I can't stand it a minute longer — I'll have to tell you the worst! Hardly had Rex and I got home from our ride when the telephone rang. Gath Singleton — at least it sounded like Gath's voice — said Carl wouldn't be home for dinner. He said Carl was

suffering from the climate — that he was in bed! Do you suppose he's laid up somewhere with a sun-stroke?"

"In bed?" Ned stood stock still, in order to collect his tired wits for speedy and efficient guidance. This must be accomplished at once, thus sparing Aunt Esther from a nervous headache and Rex from a crying spell. For Rex — though he seldom shed tears — never knew enough to stop whenever he once got started; moreover, he always gave vent to his grief in such a noisy and exasperating fashion, Ned feared that a demonstration would surely draw a crowd in such a congested place as Chicago.

"Perhaps I misunderstood him," went on Mrs. Fortune, to relieve Ned's anxiety; "he hung up the receiver before I could inquire into the particulars. I didn't mean to alarm you, Ned dear; I'm sorry I wrote you a note that distressed you. And I came right over here. What else could I do? But the boys aren't here, and the housekeeper hasn't the remotest idea where they are. Oh, dear — I hope it wasn't a sun-stroke!"

"I don't believe it could be that bad," said Ned, though he spoke rather faintly. Then he gained strength as he went on in words that sounded grim

and threatening: "If he isn't actually ill, I'll find out why he stirred up this useless alarm."

"Let us hope nothing serious has happened; don't worry, Ned," soothed his aunt, even at that moment finding it solacing to comfort somebody else. "I'm only thinking how you must feel about it. I hope Marje and Jean weren't frightened when I telephoned them."

"Naturally they would be ill-at-ease," said Ned. "They returned from the party before Jack and I started out to find the Singleton residence. Marje seemed especially distrustful, and I had to tell her what was in your note — that something evidently had happened to Carl."

"Oh, poor Marje — and poor little Jean!" burst forth Mrs. Fortune before she could restrain herself; whereupon Rex took his cue and at once began indulging in what the other Merrymakers most detested — one of his prolonged "bawling spells." But neither his aunt nor his brother were inclined to pay him the attention he had counted upon getting — a fact that added temper to his exhibition and changed his mournful tune to a higher key. Then Jack Gore came in from the hall; he was limp and perspiring, coal specks sociably mingled with his brown freckles, and his shoes were covered

with dust, notwithstanding his efforts to mop it off with his handkerchief.

"What *shall* we do, Mr. Gore?" implored Mrs. Fortune, the velvet orchids in her smart hat bobbing frantically.

"I think it's best to keep quiet and wait," advised Jack Gore, though he was aware that Patience never had a more remiss disciple than he himself. "It's silly to worry. Carl just decided to stay out a while longer, and Gath did the telephoning. What's the use of scaring this poor little kiddie to death? Come here, Rex, you rascal, and get on my lap."

Soon Rex was sobbing on Jack's lap — the kind of sobs produced by a youngster's consciousness of anxiety, heat, hunger, and a desire to contribute more than his share to a dramatic moment. "If the boys don't turn up soon," said Jack, "we'll notify the police and run 'em down; it will serve 'em right for playing such a prank, though I've played the game myself when I was their age. Don't worry, Mrs. Fortune; you're just nervous, and you have a journalistic imagination. Marje will telephone if Carl turns up there. She's as cool as a lake breeze. She wouldn't flinch a muscle if a burglar knocked us all down one by one; she'd keep cool, so she could look after us, and she'd make it mighty warm

for the burglar. Then she'd give vent to tears of joy when it was all over."

"But I can't believe the boys are to blame," persisted Mrs. Fortune. "I'm positive Gath said in a strange voice — a very thick and unusual voice — that Carl had just been put to bed."

The other occupants of the room, with the exception of Rex, stared ruefully at one another. "So many things happen in Chicago," she added significantly.

"If I thought there was anything the matter with Mr. Gath, I'd 'phone his brother at Pe-o-r-y," put in the housekeeper, beginning to take on the seriousness imbuing her unbidden guests. "And if I 'phoned Mr. Basil, I know he'd want me to wire their parents; Mr. Basil never takes much responsibility when it comes to Mr. Gath."

By this time the gardener and the laundress were also in the drawing-room; they were democratically mingling with the visitors, and both were inclined to think that the worst had happened.

"Can't you think of some place where Gath might possibly be?" asked Ned of the puzzled housekeeper. "Where does he spend his spare time?"

"I don't know," was the vexed reply. "He

goes to hundreds of places, and he has more spare time than anybody I know. He's apt to be 'most anywhere except with his tutor."

These suppositions of Mrs. Brocker seemed to grow more and more disconcerting as they sat there waiting. The good woman also thought it was not unlikely that Gath might have decided to go to an amateur prize fight, or out paddling in a flimsy canoe. But before Ned could voice another suggestion the door-bell again pealed forth.

"It must be they," said Jack Gore, only to look aghast like the others when a tall man in a crash suit and carrying a small black valise entered the room and swept the mixed assemblage with inquiring gaze.

"It's Dr. Valentine!" cried Mrs. Fortune, much relieved. "Good evening, Doctor. Ned, I neglected to tell you that — that as soon as I heard about Carl being put to bed — and all that terrible talk — I telephoned my physician to come over here at once. Please don't be angry. I thought we would surely need his services in — in case of an emergency."

"He's surely welcome if he can help us out of our trouble," said Jack Gore with a snicker.

"I received a telephone call about five o'clock

from young Singleton," Aunt Esther began explaining to the nonplussed physician. "He said that my nephew was under the weather — had to be put to bed. Of course, I couldn't imagine where Gath would be likely to put him to bed unless it were right here in his own home. So I came over. We haven't any clue to the whereabouts of the dear boys yet — but we're hoping and praying to hear the truth soon. But please don't desert me, Doctor; you've always been so prompt and faithful whenever I needed your services."

Dr. Valentine was not particularly alarmed; he had grown accustomed to Mrs. Fortune's frequent but unnecessary calls for aid in the recent past, and had always correctly surmised that the good lady was more in need of good cheer than anything else; nevertheless, he seemed to be more and more in doubt as he sat down by the marble Diana and gazed at the anxious faces all about him.

Then the door-bell clanged again, and the overwrought housekeeper waddled out to satisfy its demand. Everybody held his breath till Marje and Jean appeared, both pale and entirely wanting in composure; Jean had been crying, and Marje evidently had been trying to quiet her. Never had they received such a cool reception into any drawing-

room; possibly for the reason that they had not been invited there.

"We've all gone too far," said Ned sternly. "We're perfect geese. Why didn't you girls stay at home?"

"Well, why didn't the rest of you *come* home?" fairly shrieked Jean, flying straight into the arms of her big brother. "We want to know what's the matter with Carl. You mustn't keep things from us; it never pays, you know."

"Even Mother Marje has lost her nerve," playfully taunted Jack Gore as he glanced at the statue-like Marje, every whit as pale and rigid as Diana.

"We couldn't wait a minute longer," declared Marje, flopping down on the couch by her aunt. "I thought the clock would never strike seven — but it did. How is Carl — where is he?"

"Out having a good time," bantered Jack Gore, tweaking one of Jean's ringlets and rolling his eyes around in a funny way behind his tortoise-shell glasses, in an attempt to imitate Marje in her seriousness.

"I don't believe it," said the excitable Jean, running over to Mrs. Fortune. "Why is Aunt Esther looking so miserable — and Ned — and Rex has been crying?"

There was no reply save a loud sniff from the laundress, who was still looking on.

"We heard the boys calling out an extra," continued Jean, with a convulsive little quaver in her voice. "It was something about a man being killed by a bandit. We were afraid it might be —"

"Nonsense," railed Ned. "What an idea you girls have gotten into your heads! It's just a scare, so people will buy newspapers. Like as not the man was killed somewhere in California. Besides, Carl isn't a man — just a young and foolish boy. Now Jean, can't you see Aunt Esther is worried? She'll not pay your way to Chicago any more if you go on like that."

"But how did you get the address of this house?" asked Aunt Esther, her curiosity surmounting her anxiety.

"We looked it up in the telephone book," explained Marje. "We'd have been here sooner; but we had to get a street-car, and the six o'clock rush isn't over yet."

As another half-hour rolled by, the conversation grew still more disconnected and excitable. Indeed, these visitors might have continued monopolizing the Singleton drawing-room for an indefinite period, had not the physician finally convinced Mrs. Fortune

that he had other patients who needed him a great deal more than did her nephew. During this interval Jack Gore had been begging Mrs. Brocker not to call up Gath's intimate friends, simply for the reason that Gath's reputation as an obedient and a home-loving son was at stake. "The boy will never forgive us if we stir up his friends," added Jack. "And his friends will guy him unmercifully. You know how the dear public loves gossip."

"But what *shall* we do," persisted Marje, anxious to act quickly and to the point.

"Let's strike a compromise," suggested Rex, by this time himself once more, since no one paid any attention to his wails. As may be supposed, the departing physician and the three servants gazed at the infant prodigy in wonderment. They did not know that Rex had a very vague idea of what was meant by striking a compromise; the phrase appealed to him only as a means of expressing action and relieving suspense.

"Rex's suggestion is a good one," championed Ned. "From the mouths of babes cometh forth wisdom, when they're not bawling or talking nonsense. Let's all go back home. Why on earth should we be waiting here — taking possession of Mrs. Singleton's house in her absence?"

"To be sure," assented Mrs. Fortune, rising. "The force of circumstances drew us here, and it couldn't be helped. We'll have Mrs. Brocker telephone us at once if anything new turns up at this end of the line. We'll go home and wait for Carl."

Her suggestion seemed acceptable; so they all hurried out to her car, which was standing under one of the big trees. The chauffeur, patiently waiting, was smoking his corn-cob pipe to pass the time. Dr. Valentine was dismissed, after he had assisted Mrs. Fortune to her seat and promised for the sixth time to seek her apartment at a moment's notice if his services should be required. Then they proceeded homeward, their silence punctured only by Jack Gore's obvious attempts to be amusing and Rex's occasional reminders that it was the first night of his life he had been compelled to go without his supper.

But what was their surprise and delight, when they reached their destination, to find Carl lolling on the couch, and Gath Singleton occupying the easiest chair! Only one light was on; it looked to the late invaders as though the room had been converted into a bachelor den, wherein prevailed the guiding principle of getting the most comfort from the least expenditure of energy.

"Carl Merrymaker!" cried Ned sternly.

Small wonder that Carl rose and looked shamefaced. But Ned's premeditated discipline was lost when all of his brothers and sisters began flying at one another and engaging in unprecedented greetings, as if they had been re-united after a cruel cyclone, and none of them injured. Indeed the strenuous hugs, and the kisses of a very smacking character, would have been very mortifying to Carl, in less strenuous circumstances; but at the time he did not care, even though Gath Singleton might choose to class him with the molly-coddles and sentimentalists.

"We were afraid you were killed or injured — perhaps sun-struck," stammered Marje, near weeping, inasmuch as the anxiety was over and her brother safe.

"I don't know what you mean," replied Carl with difficulty; then he stared at his aunt, who had thrown herself on the chaise-longue and was vigorously fanning herself. "We came an hour ago, and the janitor let us in. Nobody at home — and the house dark."

"And he's been worrying himself to death about it," exposed Gath with a mocking laugh. "He imagined all sorts of terrible things had happened

to you. He'd have notified the police if I hadn't held his coat-tail. What awful things visitors think about Chicago! It's too absurd. Now Carl, don't let on that you didn't care — you know you did. I never in my life saw such a set of love-birds as you Merrymakers — and Mrs. Fortune, too. You make me feel lonesome. And you hang on to one another like prickly burrs."

"Look here, Gath Singleton." Mrs. Fortune sat up straight as she spoke, and her fears seemed to have vanished. "I'm sure you are to blame for all we have suffered these past few hours. You're one of the most entertaining boys I know, but you're not always considerate. Now why did you telephone me from somewhere that Carl was under the weather and had to be put to bed? And then you rang off."

Gath laughed uneasily. Though he tried to justify his conduct by imagining that he had told the truth, he clearly saw that his telephone message had conveyed a wrong impression — one that had turned out to be more or less serious. "I didn't suppose for one minute that you'd be alarmed," he floundered. "I telephoned from Father's club. Carl and I spent part of the afternoon there. We took a plunge and went to sleep in the cooling-room; the

attendants put us to bed, and we slept over-time. When I woke, Carl was still snoozing, and I didn't want to disturb him. I telephoned Mrs. Fortune that we were suffering from the weather, but would be all right soon. I wouldn't have said anything about the weather, but she kept insisting that something was wrong. She was determined to come right down, no matter where we were. Never heard Mrs. Fortune carry on so — without any cause. I didn't want our dinner party spoiled, so I just hung up the receiver. Then I was afraid she'd worry still more, so I called her up again. No answer. I suppose, by that time, she was out hunting for us."

"Indeed I was," admitted Mrs. Fortune with unusual bitterness. "I suppose by that time Rex and I were driving like mad to your house; I imagined, of course, you were over there. I couldn't bear to think of Carl being put to bed in a hospital. I don't see the point of your joke, Gath."

"But you mustn't blame Carl," begged Gath, his dignity shaken by Mrs. Fortune's reproof. "He was asleep and didn't know anything about our talk by telephone — or how uneasy you got, when there wasn't any reason for it."

"At any rate," went on Mrs. Fortune unrelent-

ingly, "you succeeded in frightening us almost to death. You don't need to laugh, Ned — now that it's all over; for you took it as seriously as the rest of us did. And if it hadn't been for Mr. Gore, Mrs. Brocker would have called up all your intimate friends, Gath, and told them you were missing — also notified the police."

"Great guns!" Gath wanted to be out in the open air where he could give vent to his wrath; he rose and got his hat. "And I suppose my parents would have been back on the next express," he snapped. "I'm very sorry for all the trouble I caused, but when you cool off a little, Mrs. Fortune, you'll see that you were as much to blame as I. Some people can't even take a joke by telephone. I think I'll go and call up Mrs. Brocker."

"No — you'll not do any more telephoning today," spoke Mrs. Fortune with new authority. "You'll go right down to my car and hurry home as fast as you can. I had the chauffeur wait a while, in case of emergency. And you'll please stay at home till Basil gets back from Peoria, or I'll tell your mother all about you when she returns. I can't invite you to stay for dinner; it's too late now, and we'll probably have nothing but bread and

milk — and go to bed to restore our shattered nerves."

"That's all right, Mrs. Fortune," returned Gath, stiffly polite; "Mrs. Brocker will be so glad to get me back, she'll get up a supper fit for a king. But please remember, I wasn't entirely to blame about that telephone episode. You were so determined to make out that something terrible had happened to Carl, and I decided to let you have your own way for a while; but I was only joking. I'm sure I've been doing all I could to make Carl's stay in Chicago pleasant — but it seems that I've failed."

"I think Gath has made a satisfactory explanation, Aunt Esther," intervened Ned, by this time satisfied that the truth was out. "He said he tried to get you the second time by telephone, but by that time you were beginning the search party. Let's forget all about it and be friends."

Mrs. Fortune, too, was inclined to let the matter drop, though she was yet sorely perturbed and worn out by her recent excitement. She sat looking at Gath, as if she still thought he had been a very bad boy, notwithstanding that in spite of his faults he was rather agreeable.

"Such a rumpus about nothing!" Carl, whose outraged feelings had been silently smoldering,

could restrain himself no longer. He was standing, like one of the great orators of the Convention, and sweeping his audience with accusing gaze. "It's queer that a boy almost sixteen can't stay out for dinner without his family getting hysterical about it. I'm old enough to know how to behave — and I don't see why I have to be like a poodle led around by a string."

But Carl's open rebellion met an absurd death in the gale of laughter it aroused. In truth, it was soon lost in another entirely different emotion when Gath said good-naturedly: "Don't you care, old man. A few years from now we'll all look upon to-night as a great joke. I'm inclined to think you're rather a lucky boy. I'd give all my collections, postage-stamps and all, if I had so many brothers and sisters, and such a delightful aunt to worry about me. It's just as you said to me at the club; there's nothing like the home ties, though we imagine they chafe us a little at times. I only have one brother, and he's not especially interested in me. He wouldn't care if I stayed away a week, so long as his best girl was in town."

But Gath made no move towards getting home till he had again explained that he was the cause of all the trouble, while Carl as stoutly maintained

that he himself was entirely to blame; he had no business to nap in the day-time. Finally, Mrs. Fortune and all the others shook Gath's hand and cordially invited him to visit them again next day. So the issue seemed to be closed, and Gath hurried away to Mrs. Brocker and another dinner. When he had gone, the little gathering gave vent to an excess of merriment long held in abeyance; they had various methods of banishing the disagreeable incident from their thoughts: Mrs. Fortune simply looked grateful, Ned smiled forgivingly, Marje laughed, Jean giggled, Rex whooped, and Jack Gore roared at the top of his voice till the usual serenity was restored.

Then Mrs. Fortune made the last move in the little drama when she said: "Ned, please call up Drexel 8261, and tell Dr. Valentine we shan't need him — thank Heaven!"

CHAPTER VIII

YE CASTLE OF TOPSY-TURVY

NED MERRYMAKER and Jack Gore were on a train that had left the North Station at 7.30. Both were enjoying one of those cooling breezes from the Lake — one of those sudden and refreshing changes of temperature that frequently relieves the mugginess of a Chicago summer, and causes her stay-at-homes to rejoice that they did not spend their money for a vacation in the country or some far-away resort. They had donned their best business suits and had made other attempts to appear as well-dressed as possible, considering that they had not brought their dress-clothes to Chicago, much as they needed them at the various receptions attending the Convention.

"I say, Ned," Jack Gore was chattering, "what kind of a show are we going to? You know I'm not very strong for church socials."

"So much the worse for you," replied Ned, still gazing out at the window at the suburbs flying past them with dizzying speed. "I've been brought up

on church socials, and they haven't done me any harm. And I think they do the kiddies a great deal of good; they take to them like bees lighting down on a clover-field. I haven't any idea as to what kind of an evening we're going to have; I only know that we're to get off at Andover, walk two blocks to the left, then two to the right, and stop at a big brick house owned by a lady named Fassett. And we have to pay ten cents to get in."

Jack Gore snickered as he jingled the small change in his pocket, in order to be sure that he had plenty of dimes along. "Whatever Carl gets up is sure to be a treat," he said with enthusiasm. "He's original and he has executive ability."

"You tell him that, every time you see him — and I wish you wouldn't," protested Ned, though he gazed indulgently at his sandy friend with the mischievous eyes and tortoise-shell glasses. "I don't want Carl to get a swelled head."

"Oh, he's not one of that kind," forcibly commented Jack. "He's too modest, if anything; he never blows about himself, and he's always thinking of others."

"Between you and me," said Ned thoughtfully, "I'm sure Carl will make his mark in life. He's very industrious; he doesn't know how to get

through a vacation without working, and he's going to be sure of his calling before he decides to follow it. I'm just as eager as you to find out how he's planned this entertainment for the third ward of Aunt Esther's church at Andover; I assure you he's had no help from me. I insisted that he work out his own projects, then let Marje add her advice. I thought Marje might be able to give him a woman's point of view. Carl is inventive, Marje practical, and Jean has taste. The three of them always win out when they work together."

"What a family — what a family!" exclaimed Jack with sincerity yet in amusement. "They're just average kids, but they pull together like mettlesome horses hitched to a tally-ho. I imagine they've had heaps of fun arbitrating and striking compromises over this affair."

"I suppose so; and I think it a good plan, though sometimes they take up a great deal of time at it," laughed Ned. "At any rate, we don't have so many strikes and disturbances as some other families I know; besides they learn to get one another's point of view."

"I don't doubt it," responded Jack meditatively. "The wise counseling of a family interested in one another is a pledge of security. But don't you

think all this arbitrating and striking of compromises is apt to add to difficulties as you all grow older; for instance, when Marje gets old enough to have beaux? You'll all die old bachelors and spinsters, I'm afraid."

"Oh, we shan't worry about Marje having beaux when she's old enough. Bess has had a beau for more than a year, and it's been decided by arbitration that the lucky fellow is all right. I believe when Marje and Jean have beaux — but I hope that time is a long way off — they'll have the judgment to select desirable ones, and the family will back them. You see, we care a great deal for one another's happiness."

Jack Gore gazed indifferently at the neighboring commuters reading newspapers. It was evident that he respected the sturdy principles of the Merry-makers, yet he wondered how these would work out in years to come. For Jack had grown to think that most families, like his own, lay awake nights trying to think of ways to interfere with one another.

But Ned did not wish to continue this conversation concerning his own family, so he changed the subject. "Gath Singleton and Carl and the girls have been working, on and off, for several days to

make this church social a success," he continued. "Aunt Esther told me Carl saw every man and boy in the third ward, and got them all interested; they're going to shoulder the responsibilities and let the women have one evening for rest and recreation. At first, some of the men were very surly at Carl's suggestions; but finally they grew interested, especially after he had met the majority of them, one evening, at Mrs. Fasset's. None of the ladies know what is going to happen, in spite of the fact that they've eavesdropped and tried bribes on their husbands and sons. I predict we'll have some fun."

Jack Gore thought the whole mysterious proceedings a bit of comedy. Indeed they were both forgetful of the big Convention by the time the train stopped at Andover. On their way to the Fassett mansion they had to pass a block of neat, one-story shops. To their increasing amusement they found that each of the windows contained a flaming placard announcing "Ye Castle of Topsy Turvy." In smaller printing followed the explanation of how Mrs. Mary Fassett's residence had been transformed into a rendezvous that would make the fairy tales of the new public library seem nothing else than a series of drab and stupid dreams. The public was cordially invited to explore this palace of wonders; and

everybody was enjoined to bring along all the money he could borrow, inasmuch as the place was in possession of a "Fierce Ogre" who would demand heavy toll for every invasion of his privacy.

"It sounds pleasantly weird — doesn't it?" remarked Ned with a droll smile. "I'm sure Marje had something to do with the wording of that placard; it sounds like her."

"I wonder if Carl is the Ogre." By that time Jack Gore was as curious as all Andover.

"I hope not. I think it would be in rather bad taste for him to choose such an exalted position in his own show. Yet I'd like to see what an ogre looks like."

At that juncture a boy handed each of them a leaflet with red head-lines and a further description of Ye Castle of Topsy-Turvy. But before Jack could compliment Carl's advertising ingenuity, a pretty young lady stepped up to them and asked where Mrs. Fassett lived. She was accompanied by a dozen other young people, all obviously eager for a good time.

Ned repeated the directions his aunt had given him.

"I suppose you've both heard of Ye Castle of Topsy-Turvy," said the young lady.

"Yes, we're just on our way there," replied Ned, handing her the pamphlet he had been reading. "I hope it will be a success."

'It's bound to be," said the young lady confidently. "I'm positive the youngster at the head of it never does anything by halves. Our train was loaded down with people from several of the neighboring suburbs, so it's possible that the advertising has been general. The young man responsible for this entertainment called at my office, to ask my advice about it; I thought it very much out of the ordinary — very capital, indeed. I was so excited over it, I gave the affair a small write-up in my column of the newspaper; so I imagine people will come from the city as well."

Then the young lady thanked Ned for telling her the directions necessary to follow in order to get to the Fassett home, and she and her gay companions continued their journey.

"Of all the slow dunces!" exclaimed Jack Gore, his mouth ajar as he stared disapprovingly at Ned. "The idea of your letting that pretty girl get away without telling her that you are Carl Merrymaker's brother —"

"I didn't know she meant Carl," burst forth Ned, equally disgruntled. "I understand now; he must

have invited her to attend his show and bring a crowd. She's that newspaper woman he spoke about, the other day."

"Yes — it's none other than Miss Ethel Caldwell," returned Jack impressively. "Haven't you ever seen her daily column in some Chicago newspaper, and her picture at the top of it? You're getting to be a machine, Ned; you can't possibly forget that Convention. The first thing you know Carl will have you out-classed. Wasn't he clever to ask Miss Caldwell's coöperation?"

"I didn't know he had so much nerve," commented Ned, much taken aback; yet he managed to keep up with Jack Gore's rapid strides.

Soon they sighted the Fassett mansion; it was lighted from basement to cupola, and the blinds on the first and second floors were drawn. It surely was a castle of mystery, to be explored only by the expenditure of nickels and dimes. But their surprise increased when they found the lawn in front of the house, the piazza and its broad steps, congested with curious humanity. There were the old and the young, old gentlemen with canes and old ladies in their best bonnets, mothers with their broods and beaux with their best girls, school children and small toddlers that had to be led — all

crowding towards the entrance of the building, whose portals were to open when the clock should strike eight. Furthermore, everybody seemed to be either highly expectant or downright eager. Small wonder that the two New York reporters laughed; for this unusual sight reminded them of the throng accumulating to pour into the Hippodrome.

"Mrs. Fassett must be a good-natured soul," remarked Jack Gore. "Think of a multitude of people tramping down your lawn and tracking up your carpets!"

"Carl says she's a good fellow," laughed Ned. "She turned her house over to him, after locking up a few of her valuables. She even told him to drive tacks in the wall or perform any other mutilation that seemed necessary; she expects to have the house re-papered in the fall. I'm sure Mrs. Fassett will feel complimented to have her place turned into the sensation of the year — just for the good of the church. Good gracious, there's Aunt Esther — scrambling with the rest!"

Both reporters laughed at the sight of her. There she was, craning her neck to get a better view of the entrance; she looked youthful and pleasurably excited. Moreover, she was wearing a very becoming white dress, a dark-blue jacket, and a smart

hat with blue ostrich tips; her gold lorgnette was already taking in the sights. She was talking to the plump lady with the pretty face and others of the committee, all of them airing fine summer wraps instead of the big aprons they usually wore at church socials.

"Aunt Esther always detests crowds," chuckled Ned, laboriously making his way in her direction. "I'm rather surprised that she came."

"Oh, Ned, I'm so glad you got here early!" she cried when her nephew gently touched her arm. Both reporters agreed afterwards that they had never before seen such an animated look in her face. "And here is Mr. Gore," she bubbled. "I'm so glad you didn't have to work late."

Then followed introductions to the fat lady named Little, the thin lady named Sparks, mouse-like Mrs. Vane, and the others of the committee, most of them wearing low-necked gowns and their best jewels.

"I've got a clue to this affair," the minister's wife said to Ned. "Surely the men of the third ward know how to keep a secret, though we women tried every way possible to find out about the mysteries of this castle."

"I suppose they have the inside of the house turned wrong-side out," surmised the fat lady named

Little; but she laughed as she spoke, as though walking on a ceiling would be a welcome diversion. "But what clue did you get, Mrs. Vane?"

"I didn't hear anything," admitted the pastor's wife, "but I caught my husband stealing."

The committee rent the air with laughter and mock cries of astonishment.

'Yes," went on Mrs. Vane; "I saw him sneaking away from the parsonage, last night, with a jar of my best pickles under his arm. I followed him to this very house, and he went in the back way."

"Then they must be going to give us a supper," said the fat lady, apparently much delighted. "Even if they have nothing but pickles, I think I'd like the change. A woman gets so tired of her own cooking — particularly so, when it's hot."

"Do you see that little old woman over there — the one closest to the door?" whispered Mrs. Sparks to Ned. "Her name is Mrs. Jones; she's the church mischief-maker. She's done everything she could to spoil this party, even made a remonstrance to the town council. You know, our pastor is so desirous to have his church be one big family; but that woman hates anything that seems like sociability. She thinks church suppers are immoral, for

the reason that people eat and talk too much. Her family life isn't very pleasant — poor soul!"

"A woman with a cross face like that ought to be compelled to smile," laughed Jack Gore. "I should think her family life must be wretched, especially if she's the head of it."

Then Ned told Mrs. Sparks that he was a strong believer in the family, since all strong countries — such as England and France — built upon family life, seemed to stand the wear and tear of ages; while such ancient countries as Greece had left nothing but ideals for their successors to work out, simply because they had persisted in regarding the family as something incidental and subordinate. He grew so eloquent in the presence of this very attentive listener that he said the Kingdom of Christ would never come till the world should be one big family and everybody should have regard for his brother man.

Ned's remarks made such an impression upon the committee that they at once begged him to lecture at their sewing-circle next afternoon — an invitation Ned declined, possibly for the reason that Jack Gore was poking him in the ribs and thinking the little speech a great joke.

"It's really amusing about Mrs. Jones," con-

tinued Mrs. Sparks, again directing attention to the little woman nearest the door. "She's been working over-time to keep everybody from attending this affair."

"Consequently, she's the first on hand to try to get a peep," laughed Jack Gore. "It usually happens that way."

"But did you ever see such a crowd!" interrupted Mrs. Little, beginning to be alarmed. "I'm so afraid they'll run out of provisions; or possibly the floor will give way and let everybody down in the basement — like that day Mrs. Barber gave a reception and invited the whole town, so she wouldn't hurt anybody's feelings."

"I don't believe I'll go in just yet," declared Mrs. Fortune, suddenly growing apprehensive. "It's bound to be a crush, for at least an hour or more. Poor Mrs. Fassett! Ned, bring Mr. Gore, and let's spend the time over at the new public library; it's worth seeing. We'll join you later, ladies."

Consequently, it was almost nine o'clock before the two reporters, with Mrs. Fortune between them, returned to the Castle of Topsy Turvy. Even at that hour, the place was crowded; furthermore, everybody seemed to be unusually noisy — a circumstance that no longer held any terror for Mrs.

Fortune, after living a week with the Merry-makers.

The great door was opened by one of the church trustees. He wore a long black robe and a peaked hat of the same somber material; his spook-like appearance was relieved, however, by an artificial poinsettia sticking through a top button-hole. Soon the newcomers found themselves shaking hands with a long row of figures similarly clad; this line had been formed in such a way as to end at a small room close to the fire-place at the far end of the great hall. Here two young men in uniforms and bright-red caps checked the hats of the reporters and charged them a dime apiece — the same amount of money they had paid before being admitted to the castle. Another lad, also smartly garbed, then conducted them to the big drawing-room at the left of the hall. On their way, they observed that over the door of every room was a big white placard with printing in black letters. The placard over the door leading into the drawing-room blazoned the inscription: "Sousa's Band."

"The ten cents you paid for admission also entitles you to as much of the music as you can stand," said their young escort; so Ned and his two companions entered the apartment, which was filled with

people sitting upon long rows of undertakers' chairs —.that species of chair apt to collapse and send some fat man sprawling when he grows too much absorbed in a lap supper.

"We've had our money's worth thus far," laughed Mrs. Fortune as they sought seats in the back row. "That line of men we went through are trustees and dignitaries in the church; but most of them seldom attend services except on Easter Sunday. Carl surely did a great work in getting them interested."

Then they observed that they were facing the closed folding-doors of Mrs. Fassett's music-room, and that these doors were almost entirely covered with a poster announcing the list of musical numbers to be presented by Sousa and his distinguished band. One of the ushers shouted that they would proceed at once to render the sixth performance of the evening. The folding-doors creaked back, and a splendid imitation of John Philip Sousa stepped forth; he began to bow and make quick little gestures with his baton. This important personage wore a sleek wig and a well-clipped beard; his bosom glittered with tin badges. Before he could command attention, however, everybody seemed to know that he was none other than Harry Tripp, the wag

of the village. As for the band, it was equally unique in appearance, comprised as it was of a dozen men and boys in blue denim over-alls, big straw hats, and red handkerchiefs tied round their necks. Truly, every man and boy in the third ward professing his ignorance of music had been forced to join this grotesque organization equipped with drums and cymbals, cornets and trombones, dish-pans and potato-mashers, jew's-harps and celluloid combs covered with tissue-paper. How the audience shrieked when Tannhauser's "Awakening" burst forth in a medley of discords! Indeed, it took three ushers to prevent a panic as everybody made for the exit. But Carl's idea had worked out well; for the ice was broken, and the audience in a mood to give Ye Castle of Topsy-Turvy a more thorough inspection.

"Aunt Esther, doesn't your head ache?" inquired Ned anxiously as they returned to the hall. "I fear that terrible band has undermined your nervous system."

"I feel unusually well," assured his aunt with a merry laugh. "It's the most satisfactory musicale I ever attended. I had such a good excuse for leaving before it had finished. I hope Carl's entertainment will keep up with this initial perform-

ance. We needed a good shaking-up — and with the right kind of people."

The placard over the door of the large front room across the hall heralded the most famous tennis-court in the world; a shouting agent announced that the admission was ten cents. On this occasion, Mrs. Fortune purchased the tickets. Then followed another prolonged laugh; for at the toy tennis-court in the midst of the big dining-table a spirited game was being conducted by four well-known church members. As was stridently announced by the boy in charge of this department, none of these notable pillars of the congregation had ever "raised a racquet" till that blessed minute. So it was not surprising that people kept pouring in to view this comical contest till it was necessary to lock the door.

On side tables placed in the corners of the apartment, others were playing ping-pong and making almost as much uproar as those engaging in tennis at the dining-table. But before Mrs. Fortune and the boys could get out of this lively chain of courts, they were besieged by several lads in tennis suits selling toy racquets at ten cents apiece, to be taken home as souvenirs. Jack Gore finally succeeded in paying this additional expense.

"We must go upstairs now," said Mrs. Fortune when they were back in the long hall. "It looks to me as if they will have no trouble in raising the two hundred dollars. My, what a lark!"

Then they were joined by the fat woman named Little, who claimed that she had been so greedy in her enjoyment as to spend all her money and borrow more from the thin woman named Sparks. She, also, was ready to invade the witching apartments on the second floor. "I haven't laughed so much since I joined this church," she insisted. "But where is our pastor, Dr. Vane? Do you suppose he doesn't approve of this frolic, and possibly stayed at home?"

"Not after stealing his wife's pickles," joked Ned as they progressed to the foot of the stairway where stood Gaston and Alphonse, or some equally queer characters, whose likenesses one sees in the colored supplements of our Sunday papers. Gaston was shouting through a megaphone the list of wonders to be seen in the various rooms upstairs. "Walk up, ladies and gentlemen," he yelled, "and see the greatest aggregation of curios the world has ever known! Hello there, Mrs. Fortune — and you New York scribblers! Out with your pocket-books!"

Then they beheld Gath Singleton under his rather heavy disguise; he was holding out a tray already heaped with small change as he stood on the lowest step. Joking back at him they ascended the stairway till they came to the landing, where two equally queer-looking characters — possibly Mutt and Jeff — barred their progress by stretching out a wire.

"Do we have to pay again?" asked plump Mrs. Little. "We just paid ten cents apiece at the bottom of the stairs."

"You'll have to pass the landing one at a time," ordered Mutt.

Then the wire was lowered; Mrs. Little stepped over it and attempted to turn the landing, only to scream when an enormous mirror, extending from the floor almost to the ceiling, was shifted in such a way as to reflect her image — only, in this instance, she looked many times as fat as she actually was, as well as ludicrously short.

"That's one of those terrible mirrors one sees in amusement places along the beach," laughed Mrs. Fortune, shrinking back. "Poor Mrs. Little! Why didn't they turn the mirror in such a way as to make her look thin?"

But Mrs. Little had her laugh, too, when spare Mrs. Fortune was compelled to face the magic mir-

ror and find herself resembling a darning-needle. Then the two ladies laughed still harder when Ned confronted the glass and found himself looking at a very odd creature with a long body and tiny legs, crooked from the knees down; and all shouted gleefully when Jack Gore's image suddenly took on the form of a being such as is never seen in all the ranks of humanity; it seemed to be a puzzle made up of crooks and angles, the face long and narrow, the fat legs badly bowed.

"Those naughty boys!" chided Mrs. Fortune, turning merry eyes upon Mutt and Jeff. "What fun they are having, turning good-looking people into freaks!"

But by that time they were at the head of the stairs in another great hall, which appeared to be the setting of a peaceful dream when compared with the confusion that reigned in the music-room and the tennis-court. Its walls were covered with old photographs on mats of red, blue, or yellow; and at its far end were many antiques collected from all the rare old houses in Andover. Moreover, the hall was lighted by an immense acetylene lamp somebody had borrowed from a restaurant. At least a hundred sight-seers were staring at the photographs and scribbling on pieces of card-board to

which were attached miniature pencils. All were having an absorbing time trying to guess the names of the prominent citizens represented by these old portraits of the long ago, and each hoped to win one of the three prizes that had been generously offered by a local stationer, who was also a church member living in the third ward.

Ned and his companions were again amused when the great "Professor Lallipaloosa" turned out to be Carl, disguised as a very old and learned man with a silvery wig and flowing whiskers. There he was, in full charge of the Gallery. His own family were unable to recognize him till they heard his voice.

"Professor, your Castle is a success," greeted Ned as he shook hands with the venerable and distinguished gentleman. "I must admit that I'm rather proud of you, though it's evident that you've shocked Sister Jones and possibly one or two other church members."

"It's what they needed," said Carl with spirit. "Besides, I'm not running the Castle — simply this Gallery. Don't you think it rather pretty and interesting? I'm not worrying about the people nobody on earth can please. Already one of the women of the second ward — I think it must have

been Mrs. Jones — has complained about the mirror on the landing. She was terribly frightened when she saw herself. And she was wicked enough to say that we must have borrowed it from a saloon. But we didn't."

"I dare say she was badly shocked at her reflections," dryly remarked Jack Gore. "Possibly they all flattered her too much."

"But I want to show you this gallery," went on Carl. "The Fassett girls, Marje, Jean, Gath, and I, went all over Andover to collect the photographs, the framed pictures, and the antiques. There is the picture of the first brick house built in Andover — and the old school-house that was burned down forty years ago, and the likeness of Andover's first citizen. Over on the east wall is a fine collection of pictures; they are photographs of at least twenty-five pairs of twins born in this place. And all around the frieze are photographs of the belles of Andover — from 1848 to the present time. It's a fine study. On the antique table at the end of the hall is a splendid assortment of daguerreotypes. There is no limit to what we might have done with this art and curio collection if we'd had more time."

"You've done two weeks' work in a few days," said Ned approvingly. "You must have had very

capable help. It's all very beautiful, as well as social and historical in its nature. It's great fun to watch the older citizens trying to guess the names of the people represented by those old photographs."

"Oh, Ned — you're here!" cried Jean, suddenly springing from somewhere, to the delight of both Ned and their aunt. "Oh, you must all come in and see the funny side-show! Marje and I spend most of our time in there. You'll laugh yourselves to pieces."

Forthwith, she pulled Ned away from Carl and into a room leading directly from the hall of photographs. The placard over the door announced "Professor Spug and his Greatest Aggregation of Human Curiosities." Inside was the Professor, flashily attired, especially when it came to the matter of jewelry. In a loud voice he was introducing his weird collection of freaks. There was the most beautiful woman the world had ever known since the days of Cleopatra — in reality, a high school boy, his face a mass of freckles and rouge, corkscrew curls dangling over his scraggy shoulders, his green gown ablaze with cheap and startling gems. Then came the "Wild Man of Pomerania" tied to the leg of a bed with a long black-silk thread; the "Long-lost Charley Ross" — now a man fat and

white-haired; the "Bearded Lady" and the "Giantess," both well-known citizens in ludicrous attire; and 'Little Tom Thumb," a tiny boy sitting on a sewing-table and selling his own photographs. Indeed, neither Aunt Esther nor Ned wondered that the girls had spent most of the evening at the sideshow; for Spug's introductory speeches were exceedingly witty, and the antics of his freaks sufficiently comical to make the grouchiest person in the world burst into laughter.

Another room that interested them was the "Bridle Chamber"; it, also, contributed the element of surprise, though it was nothing else than Mrs. Fassett's guest chamber — a model of cleanliness and comfort, with a horse-bridle swung over the back of a chair.

"You see," explained Marje. "We didn't know what to do with this room, though Carl and I talked it over for an hour. It looked so pretty, we didn't have the heart to change it. So we left it just as it was, and Nell Fassett got a bridle from the garage — one that hasn't been used since horses went out of date."

But by that time Jean was tugging at Ned, to lead him to the "Conservatory," which was still another surprise for people who liked that sort of

thing. This room was dark except for a tiny candle lighting a small plant perched on a three-legged stool in the middle of the room. Closer scrutiny revealed the fact that the bloom so daintily displayed to the public was a blue rose from some cast-off hat, which Aunt Esther remembered as belonging to one of the Fassett girls. Consequently she laughed again, though Jack Gore stood unmoved, which proved to all that while some people prefer one kind of humor, others just as intelligent clamor for something entirely different. They all agreed, nevertheless, that Carl and his assistants had succeeded in getting much variety out of their arrangement of the Castle, and that they undoubtedly had pleased everybody, barring such malcontents as Mrs. Jones, the little old lady who thought sociability immoral.

"Poor Mrs. Fassett!" Aunt Esther persisted in lamenting. "It will take her servants a week to get this place presentable again."

"She said we could do as we pleased," put in Carl, who had joined them once more. "And her servants won't have to do a thing; the men of the ward have hired several people to clean out the place to-morrow. Now get your pocket-books ready again; you must go into the room across the hall. We call it 'The Andover Fishing-Pond.'"

Much commotion prevailed in this darkened room controlled by several young fishermen in straw hats and slouch garments. Some of them were showing the visitors how to fish with small poles, to which bent pins at the end of long strings were attached; others were concealed behind the sheet stretched across one corner of the apartment. Soon Mrs. Fortune and the two newspaper correspondents were casting their lines and waiting patiently to see what they should fish from that white muslin pond.

"Don't expect much, Auntie," advised Marje. "You might fish up something terrible. The boys have rummaged every garret in Andover, to get articles for the fish-pond, and the supply is nearly exhausted. This attraction went amazingly well."

Mrs. Fortune suddenly pulled out her line, to find dangling on the hook an empty can that formerly had contained talcum powder; at the same moment Jack Gore dragged forth a sample bottle of soothing-sirup, while Ned landed a scarlet hair-bow badly soiled. Evidently the waggish lad at the bottom of the pond was running out of supplies, or else he was an adept in making the anglers feel ridiculous.

But the pond was soon forsaken by Mrs. Fortune and her party, for so many other places of interest kept clamoring for their small change. Indeed,

none of the amusements could be visited free of charge except the "Conservatory," the "Bridle Chamber," and the "Art Gallery."

"We don't care how much it costs — just so we see everything," that lady kept saying as she spent her money, notwithstanding that Jack and Ned were trying to do more than their share. "I feel as lively as Jean, though I must confess that the Sousa band gave me a dreadful shock."

"We're going up to the cupola now," announced Carl, leading the procession. "I can get away from my post long enough to take the trip with you."

Their journey up the spiral staircase was fraught with mysterious curiosity. When Carl reached the top, he glanced through the open door into the cupola with its eight narrow windows, then motioned for the others to follow him. The place was dark save for two candles sputtering in skull candlesticks. A bear-skin rug almost entirely covered the floor; sofa pillows and grass mats were strewn everywhere. Sitting by a small table was the Ogre of Topsy-Turvy; his sole occupation for the evening was to tell people's fortunes. He had long white hair and a beard equally as long and disheveled. Surely the picture was grimly fascinating

"SITTING BY A SMALL TABLE WAS THE OGRE OF TOPSY-TURVY"

— worth the exertion undergone in climbing the long stairs.

"Good evening, Ogre," said Carl, with obsequious politeness meant to spell fear. "Will you be so kind as to tell our fortunes?"

The Ogre grunted and held out a flat object that resembled the top of a skull, though it turned out to be the lid of a collar-box. "Put in your dimes, please," he said in sepulchral tones that caused Rex to tremble and cling more closely to Ned.

"Approach, Sister," resumed the Ogre when he had collected his fees; he lifted up a wand much like a bamboo cane in appearance. "Your name is Fortune. You are rightly named; for you will remain fortunate so long as the Merrymakers make merry. Yes, I'm sure your future will be brighter than your past, if you continue to make it so. You shall be blessing and blest wherever you go."

Mrs. Fortune was much pleased with the many complimentary remarks the Ogre continued to make; indeed, she rather reluctantly gave up her place to Ned.

"And you, Brother," went on the Ogre, turning to Ned, "are a very excellent young man in many respects. Your toil shall be rewarded and great happiness shall come to you. There is only one

line in your palm of a questionable character; it marks a very serious defect. Shall I tell you what it is?"

Ned hesitated; in truth, he trembled. But he did not have time to reply before Carl interrupted: "Yes, tell it, Ogre. We all belong to the same family, and we all have a right to know what it is."

"Shall I tell?" asked the Ogre, peering at Ned through the oblong peep-holes in his mask.

"Yes," replied Ned faintly.

"It is this," cried the Ogre fiercely —"you break into people's houses!"

"What!" Ned was evidently vexed at such familiarity.

"It's true — true as preaching. Once you broke into a house and committed a crime."

"Prove it," dared Marje.

"You stole into the apartment of a lady on Grand Boulevard, and smothered a steak with onions!"

"Oh, Dr. Vane, is it you!" exclaimed Mrs. Fortune. "What a terrible Ogre you are!"

But it was not till the Ogre had told the remaining fortunes — none of them so alarming as Ned's — that he replied to Aunt Esther: "Yes, I'm the Ogre." At the same time he pulled off his mask, thus displaying his clipped beard, red even in the

dull light afforded by the two candles. "I simply must have a breath of air," he apologized. "But please don't tell anybody who the fearful Ogre is — just yet. A few of my parishioners might think I'd better be employed in getting up my Sunday sermon than in playing the Ogre at Carl Merry-maker's show. Yet it's been great fun. I've told them all about their weaknesses; I've said a great many things I never dared tell them from the pulpit."

"We'll not tell," promised Mrs. Fortune. But before she could say more, other investigators entered the cupola, and the pastor was forced to adjust his disfiguring mask once more.

Then Carl led the others down the two flights of stairs to the main hall where unusual festivity reigned. Sousa's Band in single file was making a parade through the building; following them were the freaks from Professor Spug's side-show, the bearded woman gamboling along at the rear.

In the "Banquet Hall" back of the tennis court they found greater repose and comfort. Aunt Esther exclaimed rapturously at the sight of pink-shaded candles and a forest of scattered oleander trees covered with artificial flowers of the same color. Chairs and settees were placed under the

blooming boughs; a dozen middle-aged men in white coats and wearing pink boutonnières were serving the guests with large dinner-plates containing a collation that consisted of ham sandwiches, salad, thin slices of buttered bread, and plenty of jelly. Each banqueter was also given two peanuts and a solitary pickle purloined from his wife by Dr. Vane. Added to this repast was a cup of steaming coffee. Indeed the accommodations rendered by the middle-aged men of the church were worth a quarter — according to Jack Gore's enthusiastic assertions — and that young gentleman was accorded the courtesy of paying the bill for his entire party.

Supper finished, they found there was still another attraction to investigate. This could be seen through the round hole in the door leading from the dining-room into the kitchen; but it could not be viewed except by the payment of another nickel and waiting in line until one's turn was announced by the " Custodian of the Peep-hole."

When Mrs. Fortune gazed into the culinary realms, she began to laugh so violently Ned feared for her nerves and headaches. For the dish-washers and scullery employees in this kitchen known as the " Caboose " turned out to be the older men of the church, most of them in big gingham

aprons; they were hard at work, under the supervision of a bank president whose duty it was to settle all disputes and keep the sinks clean.

"I'm inclined to think the caboose was the best part of the entertainment," Mrs. Fortune remarked when they had returned to the main hall, and the boys were waiting for their hats. "How delighted some of those visiting ladies must be to see their men working in the kitchen!"

But at that moment the Wild Man of Pomerania, who had been turned loose on the public after the parade was at an end, made a dash at Carl and cried out enthusiastically: "Did you hear the news, old top? They say we've cleared five hundred dollars, and the money isn't all counted yet."

"Too bad we didn't charge more admission," replied Carl; nevertheless, he was even more elated than the Wild Man of Pomerania.

"It looks as if the parsonage will have three rooms to the addition instead of two," exulted Marje. "I'm so happy, I could take that big megaphone away from Gath Singleton and roar through it, just like the big lake during a storm. It's been worth all our trouble."

But, as always happens when a band of conscientious people work together for the good of some

cause, there was at least one person present to sow seeds of discord. This thorn in the flesh was Mrs. Jones, who had disapproved of the entertainment, yet had been the first on hand to see with her own eyes all the immorality that might ensue. She met Carl at the foot of the stairs and caught him by the lapel of his coat. "Young man," she rebuked, "I doubt if your circus was exactly proper. If it had been, I'm sure our dear pastor would have been present to help it along. I shall call on him to-morrow and see what he has to say about it."

"It's possible that your pastor might object to the fortune-telling in the cupola," snickered Jack Gore.

"No doubt of it," returned Mrs. Jones, taking him seriously. "The idea of telling fortunes in a dark cupola — or anywhere else, for that matter! And such a fortune teller as that man was! If I could find out his name, I'd give him a piece of my mind. He had the impudence to tell me that I'd be better off if I'd stop looking for the motes and beams in other people's eyes, and take better care of my own eyes. Did you ever hear anything so personal!"

CHAPTER IX

MARJE'S CALLER

"OH, Miss Merrymaker, I'm mighty glad to find you at home!" Miss Cora Parker, the maid of a hundred occupations, who had thought so little of Mrs. Fortune's summer furs and other valuables as to dump them into a writing-desk, was at the door; she was smiling and holding out a cotton-gloved hand. Marje observed that she wore a decent black dress and a smart hat of her own making; also that the visitor was much rouged and perfumed, and that she was balancing herself on heels of unusual height.

"Come right in," was Marje's cordial greeting as she shook the extended hand with unusual zest. "I'm glad you telephoned me early; otherwise I might have missed you. My aunt and the boys are still investigating Chicago, and my sister and I are keeping house. We're all going out to-night to a lovely garden where they are to have an operatic performance."

"Is it a beer garden?" inquired the visitor, not

from curiosity but simply to make conversation.

"No, I think not," replied Marje, not in the least offended. "I think it's the place where Damrosch's Orchestra plays; I don't believe Ned would take us girls to a beer garden."

"I s'pose Ned is your brother," said Miss Parker, her natural brusqueness returning. "I don't know anything about brothers. Sometimes I wish I had one or two — if they was any good. They could help me make a livin'. Yes, Ma's rheumatiz is better; but sometimes she hollers with pain — she can't help it."

By this time they had entered the drawing-room. Jean, who like her sister was dressed in a frock that seemed cool and highly appropriate, laid down her book and received the introduction Marje thought necessary. Though Jean was reasonably well-behaved, she could not keep from staring at Miss Parker; for the newcomer's strident voice, her pegging slippers and over-scented perfumery, her rouge and artificial roses, seemed to war against all her senses.

"What a cute kid!" cried Miss Parker, just as though Jean were Rex instead of a girl ten years old. Yet Jean smiled and took a chair facing Miss Parker, so she could look her over with the least

possible exertion. Even from that rather startling caller she might be able to learn something valuable; at least, she was bound to be amused.

"She's lots prettier than you," continued Miss Parker, looking from Jean to Marje, in such a way as to embarrass both sisters. Jean ached to say that she did not think it much of a compliment to be recommended for her good looks, since beauty was apt to grow insipid unless there were several good traits to back it up.

"I'm glad you think so," said Marje appreciatively.

"Bess says — she's my sister —" began Jean, "that beauty is only skin deep —"

"She must be a queer one," rather scornfully interrupted Miss Parker, still gazing at Jean with mouth slightly ajar.

Again the sisters exchanged apprehensive glances. Evidently this strange-spoken visitor had developed some ideas of her own — ideas rather squalid and not exactly logical. Be that as it may, Marje saw something in that honest but warped character worthy of consideration. So she laughed good-naturedly, and Jean followed her example, while Miss Parker's unaccustomed eyes traversed the bric-a-brac on Aunt Esther's mantel.

"Sister Bess has acted as our mother for several years," explained Marje. "You see, our parents are both dead. Bess is a remarkable girl; but she doesn't like us to say it before strangers. She thinks some people make it ridiculous — always talking about their families; she thinks parents make a great mistake in thinking their children are better than other people's —"

"I should say so," agreed Cora Parker with such astuteness Marje lost her sentence. "And I don't s'pose your sister Bess is any better than anybody else's sister; you just think so. A girl with lots of money ought to be remarkable — and they ought to be sweet all the time. It's no wonder some of 'em are so sweet, it makes a person thirsty for pickle-brine."

"But Bess isn't rich," Jean thought it wise to explain.

"I'm not 'specially interested in your sister Bess," testily informed Miss Parker. "I'm more interested now in this sister you call Mag."

"Marje," corrected both girls.

"Yes, Marje," said Cora more politely. "I come right up here to thank her for what she's done for me —"

"Please don't," protested Marje, notwithstanding that she was much pleased.

"I didn't say all I wanted to, by 'phone, Miss Marje — so I'm goin' to say it now," persisted the caller. "You certainly done a great thing for me — and I'm goin' to prove that there is at least one animal in this world that can show gratitude — and that's me. No more workin' by the day for me."

"What does she mean?" Jean gazed forcefully at her sister.

"I didn't tell Jean about it," said Marje, somewhat confused. "My brother Carl and I thought we'd keep it a secret till everything was settled — though we told Aunt Esther, so she could help. Don't be hurt, Jean; I intended to tell you this evening."

"Miss Marje surely done a handsome thing for me," reiterated Cora to Jean, her dark eyes shining their approbation. "It's just like her and her brother to keep it to 'emselves. Never saw such modest folks. I was makin' leaves and stringin' berries at one of the big stores for Mr. Smith at a dollar and a half a day; and glad I was to get such a respectable job and the money. I knew they'd let me go as soon as the job was done, and

I'd have to work by the day again till I got somethin' I liked; yet I worked just as hard and patient as if I'd been hired forever and ever. One day Smith — he's the man that hired me — called me to one side and asked me if I'd like to learn the millinery business. I told him I'd love it like a mother. Then he gave me the address of the lady that owns the swell French shop, over in the Boulevard dee-strict. I went over when my day's work was done, and stood outside lookin' in the windahs. It was such a classy place, I was afraid to step a foot inside. Never saw such bows and feathers and flowers and flub-dubs in my life! The head lady — all dressed up like a May-pole — sent me into a little back room, and pretty soon the lady boss come in. She was stuck-up at first; but she thawed considerable when she found out who I was. Said she would put me in the work-room where they make hat foundations. She said I'd have to learn how to cover wire frames. That's just what I wanted to do. Why, when I see some of them fashionable dames on Michigan Boulevard, I just want to grab 'em and shape over their hats for 'em! They wear anything that happens to be the style, whether it's becomin' or not. That's why so many tall women wear flat hats; besides, they think it cuts off their

height and makes 'em look shorter. And lots of fat women bunch 'emselves up under butter-bowls turned upside-down, with plumes stragglin' down their backs —"

"Oh, Miss Parker, you're so funny!" fairly shrieked Jean, amused not only at the caller's method of expression but her firm sincerity.

"Now when I work into the king row, I'll tell them fashionable dames the truth," proceeded Cora, unmindful of Jean's interruption. "I think it's a crime to take their money, and send 'em out lookin' like cartoons."

"I think you'll find it best to give them just what they want," suggested Marje, who had learned that very important point from a milliner in her home town. "You know, if you told most women they look terrible in the hats they like, they'd be furious. Of course, you can give them good advice; but you mustn't expect them to take it."

Marje felt that she was in a trying position for a girl of fourteen already burdened with the responsibilities attached to making herself a model little mother to a lively family of children away visiting. And now, added to these duties, was the starting of that strange and incomprehensible girl, Cora Parker — at least twenty years old. Thor-

oughly imbued with the spirit of her project, however, Marje kept on planning some method of influencing her protégée — some way that would not make her (Marje) appear preachy or priggish.

But before she could speak again, Cora continued vibrantly: "Smith didn't have much to do about it; he just gave me a reference. The one that really opened the way was Mrs. Fortune; she buys all her hats at that French shop. She spoke a word for me; but she wouldn't have done it if it hadn't been for Miss Marje. When I get through with them Christmas fixin's, I'm to go over to that big millinery shop and learn the whole business, from the ground up. Not much of a salary to start with; but I've lived on less."

"I'm so glad," gushed Jean, her animated face establishing her sincerity. "It was nice of Marje and Carl to take such interest in you — and Aunt Esther, too. But I wish I might have had a hand in it."

"You see how it was, Jean," Marje again apologized: "Carl and I felt that we were the only ones responsible. We — we owed it to Miss Parker — and we couldn't take anybody else in. Of course, we told Aunt Esther about it, so she could lend a hand — and she did."

But before Jean could assure her sister that she was not in the least offended at not having been one of the good angels to make it such smooth sailing for Miss Parker, their grateful visitor burst forth with great jubilation: "I'll get to the top, I tell you! Some day I'll be wearin' di'monds."

Marje was alarmed. Young as she was, she wondered if Cora's bringing-up had been so faulty as to preclude her from meeting success with the modesty that makes it permanent. "If I were you, Miss Parker, I don't believe I'd bank too much on the distant future," she offered, with that kind sincerity that harbors no offense. "Just live every day as it comes — and keep your aim high. You'll have a great deal to learn. For one thing, you'll have to dress just as plainly as possible — and you'll have to practice a little on your English —"

"What's the matter with my English?" snapped Cora, so sharply that Marje caught her breath. "I never had no trouble makin' folks understand me."

"You'll have to get a language book and study up," ventured Marje. "You'll have to learn how to use your pronouns; and you must listen to refined people when they talk — that is, if you expect

to make an impression on ladies and sell hats to them."

"I'm sure I talk as good as some of them society girls I see on the street," flared Cora. Evidently she had the sensitiveness that protects the artistic temperament from too rough handling.

"I don't doubt it," was Marje's guarded response. "But it takes a long time for anybody to learn to speak English as the best Americans do. Jean and I have been trying all our lives to learn how to talk."

"Just give me time, and I'll talk as stylish as anybody," said Cora with staggering assurance. "I'd have done it long ago if I hadn't been afraid the girls I work with would guy me; they'd have roasted me to death."

Marje's honest heart sank, but she replied patiently: "You must be natural in your talk — not too stylish; you must never strain your English, or — or put on airs. Everybody would laugh at you. And you must use your verbs and pronouns correctly —"

"I wouldn't reco'nize one of 'em if I caught it tryin' to break in the house," confessed Miss Parker with comical glibness.

Then Marje took from the table a small red book

and handed it to her charge. "That's the little volume I study whenever I have the spare time," she said. "It's dry at first; but you'll soon get interested — especially when you find out how little you know about it. You're welcome to this copy; I can get another one."

"Thanks," said Miss Parker, regarding the book not as a means of improvement but as something she had gotten for nothing. Yet Marje was pleased that Cora had accepted her treasure, especially when its recipient began wetting her fingers to turn the pages.

"I'll read every word of it if I die," threatened Miss Parker; "and so will Ma. She reads everything she can get — just to kill time. I laid awake last night, wishin' I could get a little bit more schoolin'."

"I used to bother so much about those little verbs, *lay* and *lie,* and *sit* and *set,*" said Marje, having seen it was the right time to give Miss Parker a very helpful pointer. "Jean and I call them the troublesome words, because they bother everybody — especially the people that have to hear them. Jean and I made up a little song, so we could learn to use them correctly. Do you remember it, Jean?"

As the song and the lesson incorporated were

still fresh in Jean's memory, she piped forth to the tune of "Yankee Doodle":

"I *set* my screen against the door,
Just as I *set* it Friday;
As I *have set* it oft before,
To make the room look tidy.

I *sit* so still and thoughtful, too,
Just as I *sat* last Monday;
As I *have sat* the whole week through —
I hope I can on Sunday.

I *lay* my garments on the chair,
Just as I *laid* them last time;
As I so oft *have laid* them there
When sleep came as a pastime.

And now I *lie* upon my cot,
Just as I *lay* last night, dear;
As I *have lain* since as a tot
I first saw Life's gay light here."

Jean's earnest vocalizing seemed to be wasted, so far as anything instructive was concerned; for Cora Parker was in spasms of merriment by the time the song was at an end. Jean looked at her in surprise.

"You've got the cutest way of singin' it," declared the visitor, wiping her eyes. "It's enough to make a horse laugh — the way you ducked your head when you used the words *sit* and *set,* or *lay* and *lie.*"

"Jean did that for emphasis," rather helplessly explained Marje. "At any rate, since we began to sing that song, we've learned how to use those troublesome verbs so they won't sound ridiculous. Of course, we make mistakes with some of the other troublesome words; but I don't believe you'll ever hear us say that we *set* up till midnight, or that we *laid* awake."

"Marje composed the verses," said Jean with pride. "She's written other poems about troublesome words. Marje is a poetess —"

"I should say she is," agreed Miss Parker somewhat too promptly as she beamed upon the family versifier.

"Some day Ned is going to have them published," further boasted Jean.

"You'll have a grand time working up from the bottom of the business to the top," said Marje, determined to change the subject. "When you learn how to make frames, they'll possibly set you to trimming. Then if your conduct and your English are good enough, they'll try you out as a saleswoman; Aunt Esther said so. Some day you may be a buyer — be sent to New York once or twice a year. Or you might have a shop of your own."

"Indeed I will," cried Miss Parker, with great

faith in her own ability. "I'll be a sales lady inside of a year; I'll have all the Big Bugs callin' for Miss Parker."

"Aunt Esther says," began Marje haltingly, "you'll have to be pleasing and accommodating as well as honest and industrious. You must learn how people of refinement act and talk — and use their voices. Why can't you arrange to take your luncheons at the Y. W. C. A.? You'd find so many girls with high ideals there. Do you read much?"

"Oh, I don't hurt myself at it," said Miss Parker indifferently. "I have to save my eyes all I can — and I get awful tired. Real life is worryin' enough without botherin' about stories that ain't true. Somebody gave me 'Lena Rivers' to read. I didn't care much for the girl; she was such a sap-head."

"I'll give you a list of the Hundred Great Novels," said Marje with alacrity. "You can get them all at the public library. And Mr. Smith says you'll have to learn all about materials — such as cloths and silks — and know how to handle them. Oh, Miss Parker, you'll have a wonderful time improving!"

"I'm dead sure of that," acquiesced the caller, not in the least daunted. "I'm goin' to work hard. I'll learn how to use grammar and be a lady —

and how to handle materials and people — or know why not."

"Aunt Esther and Rex are coming," was Jean's delighted announcement. From the bay-window she could see her aunt's motor-car, a block away; it was approaching rapidly, under a canopy of waving tree-tops. "I do hope they've had a nice time."

"You must stay and have tea with us, Miss Parker," was Marje's imperative invitation as she rose suddenly. "Aunt Esther always has tea at this time of day, no matter how warm the weather is. I don't care much for tea, but I like the custom of having it with friends; it's so sociable."

"Goodness sakes! I'll have to make tracks," cried their caller, looking panic-stricken. She seized her hat and with unsteady hands began putting it on. "I merely come over to thank you for what you've done for me. But I'd as soon think of meetin' Queen Mary as your Aunt Esther."

"But you must stay," almost commanded Marje. "It will give you a fine chance to study a real lady. I hope Aunt Esther will be herself — not nervous. You must remember that she's the one that made it possible for you to start in that French shop. Some day she may be buying all her hats of you; that is, if you make good — and you surely will."

Thus importuned, Miss Parker could do nothing else than accept the invitation. Again she rolled up her black-cotton gloves and put them in the pocket of her jacket. Then she took on such dignity that Marje felt encouraged. "I think I'd like to fix my hair," said Miss Parker, after glancing at herself in a mirror.

"Yes, do; I'll take you back to my room," volunteered Marje, leading the way. "No doubt you'd like to wash your face, too."

"Not much! I've spent too much time on my face to want to wash it off," laughed Miss Parker, following her hostess down the long hall.

"Jean," Marje called back; "won't you please get the tea-table ready while I get the tea and help Miss Parker? Be right at the door, so Aunt Esther won't have to ring. It's always pleasant to have some one waiting for you. Come right on, Miss Parker."

Accordingly, Mrs. Fortune and Rex were met at the door by a smiling little girl who made a great fuss over their safe return. Then she flew about setting the small tea-table. She thought her aunt very lovely as she stood in the library-hall; for Mrs. Fortune was wearing white again, and a hat suggesting by its cool appearance that it was highly

appropriate for mid-summer. And indeed, that lady had improved much in appearance since that hot day her relatives had arrived from the East; for the light of greater contentment shone in her eyes, and no distrust nor apprehension twitched the corners of her mouth.

"Did you have a nice time?" asked Jean, busily arranging napkins for five.

"Splendid — didn't we, Rex?" responded Mrs. Fortune with a sly wink at her nephew to indicate that they had many happy secrets of their own.

"Sure we did," stoutly agreed the boy, taking advantage of Marje's absence to throw his hat on the floor. "We went over to Lincoln Park to see the bears — and we had peanuts."

"Oh, Aunt Esther!" squealed Jean, dropping a spoon.

"Yes, we did," confessed her aunt, laughing so heartily that Jean joined in with her.

"It's no harm to eat peanuts," said Jean; "but I can't imagine Aunt Esther doing such a thing — especially in a public park. Rex must have coaxed you into it."

"No, he didn't," denied Aunt Esther. "I was trying to think of something that would please him, and I happened to think of peanuts. Then I re-

membered that I hadn't eaten one for years and years — so I got two bagsful, and we went off to a quiet corner and ate every one of them. They tasted like old times."

"Oh, look at the little sugar-cakes with red cinnamon-drops on 'em!" shouted Rex as Jean set them on the table. For to the enthusiastic Merrymakers every diversion, however slight, was an event.

"We're to have a guest for tea," said Jean guardedly. "I forgot to tell you, Aunt Esther. It's Miss Cora Parker, the girl you hired to work by the day — the one you got a position in that French shop. She's going to be a great milliner some day, and a lady of refinement; Marje said so."

At this announcement Mrs. Fortune ceased joking with Rex and permitted her face to take on a very sober aspect. Surely the Merrymakers had marched rough-shod over her scruples and downright animosities for the past few days; but the fact that she was being compelled to take afternoon tea with a faithless maid-of-all-work was almost more than she could bear. She wanted to scream outright, or to take a headache tablet. Yet in that trying moment she managed to sit her chair with unprecedented dignity.

"You know, the poor girl has never had any chance," went on Jean, with some appreciation of her aunt's feelings. "Marje says she lives in a horrid place — dusty and stuffy, with big-flowered wall-paper — and a fish market down stairs — and her mother crippled up with rheumatism. She's going to learn to speak English better — and read good books — and watch how ladies act —"

But Jean never finished her pacific eulogy of Miss Cora Parker; for that young lady had already returned to the drawing-room. There she stood, arm in arm with Marje. Jean almost cried out in astonishment upon discovering the change that had befallen to Miss Parker under the patient but persistent ministrations of Marje. She had actually taken long strides towards that queenly dignity possessed in common by superior ladies. For Miss Parker's cheeks were no longer purplish-red, but their own natural color — a healthy and very becoming brown; also, her hair, dark and rather curly, had been arranged in simple but becoming style. Furthermore, she wore something white about her neck — a bit of filmy stuff belonging to Marje; it contrasted pleasantly with her black dress and gave her a cool and clean appearance.

Mrs. Fortune, likewise, seemed impressed by the

improvement in her former maid's appearance. On the contrary, the young woman showed no pleasure in meeting her former mistress. She stood awaiting some sort of recognition.

Both Marje and Jean were greatly relieved when their aunt rose to the occasion. She also rose to her feet and extended a welcoming hand to the girl in the faded black dress. "Wasn't I stupid, Cora — not to look into my writing-desk for my lost valuables!" she said with a light laugh. Her remark was evidently taken as an apology, and tacitly accepted by Miss Parker.

"I don't blame you for gettin' excited about it," said the caller, taking the chair pointed out by her hostess. "No one but a ninny would think of lookin' inside of a writin'-desk for such things. It was all my fault."

"I've got the tea piping hot," said Marje, thinking to end the rather painful interview and get things to running smoothly.

But Cora Parker was not one that evaded opportunities to set herself right. "I intended to put 'em away in a proper place," she went on, "but I got in such a hurry, I just spilt them into the first opening I could find. I never was much for house-keepin' anyway."

All this time Marje was pouring tea, while Rex stood at her side making personal remarks about the cinnamon cakes. Jean, knowing by intuition that as yet her aunt and her former maid were not reconciled to each other, tactfully broke into the conversation. "Isn't it nice," she said, "to see Aunt Esther taking tea in her pretty hat?"

"Indeed it is," agreed Marje. "I wish Aunt Esther would wear it around the house all the time; it's a dream."

"If I could make a hat like that, I wouldn't do a thing but pat myself on the back," commented Miss Parker, suddenly losing her self-consciousness at the sight of the millinery masterpiece adorning Mrs. Fortune's head. "Only I wouldn't put all the trimmin' at the front — and leave the rear of it standin' up bare and plain, like a stump struck by lightnin'."

Marje caught her breath, and at the same time set down the teapot till she could compose herself. She hoped Mrs. Fortune would not take offense; though, for two reasons she had the right to be exceedingly angry: her best hat had been maligned, and she had paid out seventy-five dollars for it.

"How should you remedy the defect?" asked Mrs. Fortune, rather scornfully.

"Well," went on Cora, forgetful of such unimportant incidents as English and manners when hats were being discussed; "in the first place, it's a hat with a fairly good shape; but the goose of a trimmer has made the top of it look like a wreath — the kind they stick on monuments out in them I-talian buryin'-grounds — and it looks lop-sided. I can't just explain how bad it really looks — but I wish I had my hands on it."

"I believe you're right about it, Cora," admitted Mrs. Fortune, who with a curiosity of a young girl had sprung up to view herself in the mirror. "There's something wrong about it, but I can't make out what it is."

"My fingers just itch to get at it," persisted Miss Parker, neglecting her tea despite her thirst. "Won't you trust me to change it a little?"

"Yes, go ahead."

Marje and Jean cringed when Cora, after being supplied with sewing utensils, ripped into the choice velvet, pulled gently at the maline, snipped with her scissors, gave a turn here and there, re-arranged a few flowers, and added a few artistic touches too subtle to be described. Her task finally accomplished, she set the hat back on Mrs. Fortune's head and gave it a slight tilt.

"Why, Auntie — it's a different hat!" cried Marje in ecstasy. "No — it isn't a hat — it's a poem!"

"It's bewildering!" exclaimed Jean.

"Miss Parker surely is a milliner; she'll be in the trimming-room before she knows it," further endorsed Marje.

"Yes — it's ever so much better," echoed Mrs. Fortune, who was positive she knew all about hats and how to wear them. She seemed to have sudden respect for her former maid; in fact, her attitude changed completely as she said: "I thank you a hundred times, Cora. I think I'll have to call you Miss Parker in the future."

Cora did not reply; she was too busy studying the hat at all angles. After a few more twists and as many gentle pats she finally said: "There — it's perfect now. It's the most becomin' hat I ever laid eyes on."

"But how did you cultivate those magic touches?" Mrs. Fortune demanded.

"I don't know; they came naturally, I s'pose. Most of them milliners ain't real artists; they're just day laborers. The first thing about a hat is its lines. S'pose, for instance, a woman's nose ain't quite straight, why put a hat on her with such

straight lines and angles that everybody begins to stare at her crooked nose? I admire seein' hats correspond with faces and figgers; but most milliners are such boobs —"

"Oh, Miss Parker!" implored Marje, though inclined to laugh, now that she was not compelled to act as chaperon.

"But it's the truth," firmly insisted Miss Parker. "I can't help but rave when I see some of them outrageous things women wear on their heads. Whenever I see a head-piece that don't look like nothin' on earth, I always say to myself that nobody but a woman or a monkey would wear it."

When Ned and Carl came home, Mrs. Fortune and the three girls were having a very engrossing conversation regarding hats. But by the time they had entered the drawing-room, Miss Parker had suddenly returned to the tortoise-shell of her reticence. Marje was indeed glad to discover that her protégée was not unduly fond of strange young men. "Miss Parker," she announced with her usual pride, "these are my two brothers, Ned and Carl." Miss Parker gave two stiff little bows and looked uneasy.

"Why don't you take off your hat and stay a

while, Aunt Esther?" joked Ned. "Yet I can't blame you for keeping it on. Though I'm a poor judge of women's hats, I never saw a more becoming one; it seems to be a part of yourself, just like your hair."

"That's just it — that's just what I was tryin' to say!" shrieked Miss Parker with an enthusiasm that sent patches of natural color to her cheeks. "It looks just like it grew there. It don't look like a wool tidy throwed over the back of a velvet chair, or a mustard plaster crumpled up on a bare shoulder."

"I bought it at one of the most fashionable places in Chicago, just to please you youngsters," said Aunt Esther, joining in the laugh. "You seemed to think my old hats so black and unbecoming, I got disgusted with them. And Miss Parker put on the finishing touches. I predict that she'll have a place of her own some day."

But the crowning event of the afternoon occurred when Mrs. Fortune and her nephews and nieces took Miss Parker to her humble home in Halsted Street, despite the pleadings of the promising young milliner that they spare themselves the agony of viewing the unsightly locality in which she lived. For not only did this ride and these agreeable asso-

ciates afford Miss Parker the happiest moments of her life, but this visit to the slums caused the Merrymakers to return to their aunt's cozy apartment with grateful hearts,— all of them charitably disposed towards the girl who had kept alive her love of the artistic, notwithstanding that she had to live above a fish-market.

"It was touching, the way that dear Miss Parker thanked me for giving her a start in life," said Mrs. Fortune when again they were seated by the open windows and looking out upon the expanse of tree-tops. "I don't deserve any credit. I never knew before that I could be of any especial help to anybody, outside of paying out money for things they actually need."

"I'm very anxious for her to start right," said Marje thoughtfully. "You see I meddled in her affairs — that day I was sure she stole your furs and things — though I meant it all right. And I wanted to do something to atone for my blunder. I'm sure Jack Gore would have called me a little prig if he had heard me telling her things that might be of help to her — when we were taking her home. Yet she taught me something I shall never forget."

"What was it, Marje?" asked Ned.

"She told me that I was a very nice girl, but that I didn't deserve any especial credit. She said any girl would be just as nice, if she had any advantages, unless she was a born loon."

CHAPTER X

THE COMPROMISE THAT ENDED HAPPILY

On the night before that dreaded day the Merrymakers were to leave Chicago — Ned to return to New York, and his brothers and sisters to their old home at Johnstown — they were thrown into a lengthy discussion that caused Jack Gore more amusement than the Republican Convention during its liveliest moment. Likewise, Gath Singleton, who was also present, thought the proceedings more absorbing than the most complicated drama he had ever seen enacted by the stock company at the old North Side Theater. From the first, Gath was convinced that Ned, being the head of his family, should have the right to manage the affairs of his household as he deemed best; but Ned, it seemed, was inclined to let each of the family, regardless of age or sex, voice his own honest opinion. Perhaps that was why arbitrations and striking compromises were so interesting to the Merrymakers, and why they were always satisfied with the results.

A gentle breeze from the moon-lit Lake was rustling the tree-tops and cooling Mrs. Fortune's handsome apartment. In one corner of the drawing-room stood a table heaped high with empty ice-cream dishes and the remnant of a frosted cake; for Jack Gore had given his friends a treat, in order to commemorate their last evening together in the great western metropolis. Mrs. Fortune had lighted her silver candelabrum on the center-table. The effect was charming; for in that subdued and flickering light, eight kindred souls seemed to be reaching out with increasing desire to approach one another more closely. Ned likened the little party to that significant piece of sculpture known as "The Solitude of the Soul," which he considered one of the most impressive things to be seen in Chicago. It represented a group of human beings banded closely together, each of them groping in the dark and unable to touch the hand of his brother. Ned knew that the medium of understanding is more effective than any other in bridging the gulf that separates the souls of men; therefore, it had always been his aim to get his brothers and sisters upon an understanding basis, thus broadening their judgment and insuring greater harmony.

At this particular time, when the discussion had

been going on for at least a quarter of an hour, Mrs. Fortune was sitting on the couch, with Jean by her side, the others of the family in a semi-circle facing her. Gath and Jack were interested spectators from a distance.

"I think it would be a crime to leave Jean behind," said Marje positively. Her voice had taken to trembling, and she had lost that calm dignity Bess had enjoined her to wear as an outer garment while visiting her Chicago aunt.

"But it will only be for a little while," argued Ned. "Besides, it will be a good thing for both Jean and Aunt Esther."

"Yes — I need Jean," declared Mrs. Fortune with great stress. 'I simply can't let you *all* go to-morrow. If you'll let her stay, I'll lock the house, take a long trip on the *Manitou,* stay two or three weeks at Mackinac, then come back to Chicago and send Jean on to Johnstown. Please, Marje, don't leave me entirely alone."

"We don't want to leave you alone, but how can we help it?" returned Marje, sorely harassed, for the reason that she was opposing her aunt with unusual obstinacy. "I know Bess wouldn't like it," she continued in rambling fashion. "She'd worry herself ill. You see, Aunt Esther, she doesn't

know you very well yet. She — she might say that we shouldn't have left Jean with a stranger."

"But I could explain it to Bess so she'd understand," assured Ned, who was his aunt's most faithful champion at that moment.

"I don't see why you take that view of it, Ned," said Marje reproachfully. "Of course, it would be all the same to you whether Jean goes back home with us, or takes that steamer ride on that — that tremendous Lake; you're going to New York. But it would be terrible for the rest of us — to go home without her."

"It seems to me," went on Ned, "that Aunt Esther and Jean should be permitted to influence us in this matter. Auntie wants Jean to stay, and Jean is just as eager. Now if there is any logical reason why Jean shouldn't have a longer visit with Aunt Esther, speak up, everybody."

"Bess wouldn't like it," repeated Marje.

"It's a girl's place to be at home with the rest of her family," seconded Carl.

"Jean's a cry-baby and gets homesick," added Rex, for once taking sides with Marje.

As the matter stood, a tie existed that could not be broken except by coercion or bribery — so Jack Gore thought.

"The last time Bess sent Jean down town for some eggs," continued Rex, "she cried every step of the way back home —'cause she was homesick."

The serene and docile Jean bridled indignantly. "I never did such a thing in my life — and you know you're telling a fib, Rex Merrymaker!" she sputtered. "I was just a little nervous because I broke an egg — somebody jostled me. I was stopping to hear that funny patent medicine man play his banjo and sing. You're getting so you stretch things terribly, Rex."

"Well, Jean dear," tactfully interrupted Mrs. Fortune," you want to stay with me — don't you? We'll have a lovely trip, and you'll get back home in time for school. Then too, it will be a good thing to separate you and Rex for a while."

"Yes — I want to stay," declared Jean, giving her younger brother a disapproving glance. "Not because I want the trip on the Lake, but because you need me. It would be cruel for all of us to leave you at the same time."

"Just about as cruel as it was for all of us to light down upon her hospitality in hot weather," put in Jack Gore.

"But I wanted them to come," stoutly affirmed Mrs. Fortune. "Yet I didn't know I was going

to grow so much attached to them — and I wasn't sure I could stand their noise. And there is just one thing about it, Marje, if you all go at once, I'll put on black again and get back into my shell."

"You mustn't! Why, Aunt Esther, you couldn't be so foolish!" cried Marje.

"Why can't you all stay and go along with Mrs. Fortune?" suggested Gath, for the first time entering into the conversation. "She's offered to take you on that splendid trip to Mackinac if you'll only go."

"Aunt Esther has gone to enough expense already," said Carl in a manner meant to show that he considered the suggestion worthless. "We couldn't think of adding to our great obligations. And Marje and I think that Bess has more right to have Jean back than Aunt Esther has to keep her."

"But Bess will have the rest of you," contended Mrs. Fortune.

"Nobody can take anybody else's place, even in a big family," checkmated Marje. "Each person has his own corner, and if he gets out of it he'll be missed."

"Don't you think your side is rather selfish, Carl?" teased Jack Gore. "Looks to me as if you

don't want Jean to have the nice trip on the water, just because the rest of you can't go."

This remark produced indignant protests, too rapidly uttered to be faithfully recorded. "You're dead wrong," fired Carl.

"I'd never be envious of Jean," said Marje with equal tensity. "I'm too careful of my own comfort to want to nurse such a maddening sensation as jealousy. You know you're only joking, Jack."

"We don't seem to get anywhere," went on Carl impatiently. "Here we are, three on one side and three on the other — and all stubborn."

"Let's permit Mr. Gore to vote, too, so we can break the tie," recommended Mrs. Fortune.

"No, indeed; he's on your side," objected Carl.

"And Jack doesn't belong to the family," said Ned. "I don't like the idea of outsiders interfering with our domestic compromises."

"I think I have it," Mrs. Fortune said with a roguish twinkle in her eye. "My suggestion may not appeal to Carl or Marje; but it may lead to breaking up their side. Rex dear, shouldn't you like to take the boat trip with Auntie and Jean?"

"That isn't fair, Aunt Esther," protested Marje. "And it wouldn't do. Rex would have to be sent to the reform school when he gets back home. You

let him do just as he pleases, and he's always wanting something. He'd make you do terrible things, like he does Jean — possibly make you hang on express wagons or turn somersaults. He never stops teasing till he gets what he wants."

Contrary to the surmise held by Carl and Marje, Rex remained loyal to his own side. "No, Auntie, I couldn't go," he said — but half-heartedly. "I want to see Bess and get back to our 'gym' in the barn. All the kids come there to practice when I'm home."

"Poor Bess!" sympathized Mrs. Fortune. "What responsibilities and noises she has to stand! I'm sure she'd much rather you would stay with Auntie, Rex."

"No, she wouldn't," bluntly refuted the youngster. "I know her better'n you do."

"I'll get you that tool-chest if you stay with me," Mrs. Fortune continued with the zeal of an accomplished temptress. She was not in the least daunted by Marje's shocked surprise nor Carl's open indignation at her lack of principle; she was too much accustomed to having her own way, and paying liberally for the privilege, if necessary.

"Well then, Carl — can't you go with me?" beguiled Mrs. Fortune.

"I couldn't even think of it," declared Carl, forgetting to thank her for the invitation. "I've had enough vacation. I must do some odd jobs and clean up a little cash before school begins."

"How about you, Marje — will you go with me?"

"No, thanks; we promised Bess we'd come back as far as Johnstown with Ned — and Ned leaves to-morrow," was Marje's emphatic reply.

"Little Angel Mother!" mocked Jack Gore. Marje colored; indeed she was tired of being considered a little prig by Jack Gore, just because she was so conscientious in representing Bess in Chicago, in order to look after three brothers and a sister, none of whom were expected to be models of good behavior.

"Why don't you say what you want done, Ned, and make 'em all act accordingly?" inquired Gath, beginning to tire of the discussion that showed no signs of ending before day-break.

"Oh, we always talk it over till the majority decides what is best," laughed Ned, by no means inclined to make use of Gath's suggested bullyism. "We're all honest, and we're going to present all our reasons for and against this argument before I act as arbiter and take drastic measures. Usually

we can settle a point in no time at all; but this is one that seems to concern everybody in the family."

"Now if I were Mrs. Fortune," jested Jack Gore, "I'd keep bribing Rex till he came over to my way of thinking."

"I just won't be bribed," was Rex's defiant retort. All the other Merrymakers glanced at him with some degree of pride. Since he could hold out against such a tempting bribe as a tool-chest, they decided that his character had been greatly strengthened by his sojourn in Chicago.

But they all looked disgusted when the youngster continued wildly: "If anybody bribes me, I'll knock him down — and when he gets up I'll knock him down — and when he gets up I'll knock him down — and when —"

"Hush!" "That's enough!" "Smarty!" squelched the various members of his family. Evidently they had formed a good opinion of him too early in the game; for Rex, tired of the discussion, had suddenly lost his poise and was making a desperate effort to be funny. He quickly subsided, nevertheless, and looked rather sheepish.

"Now I want to give my side of the question again," pleaded Jean with over-wrought earnestness. "I love you all — and you know it. It would

break my heart to have Ned leave us when we get to Johnstown; and it will break my heart when you all go away to-morrow and leave me behind. But it would break my heart still more to leave Aunt Esther all alone. I want to stay, because it's my duty; Aunt Esther thinks so, and so does Ned. So, Marje and Carl, sleep over it, and try to see it the right way."

"Very appealing argument!" cried Jack, with another of his contagious laughs. "Jean, it seems that your heart is bound to break, no matter what you do; so you might as well break it doing your duty; you're a wise girl."

Carl seemed to have caught the essence of Jean's moralizing, for he capitulated immediately. "I guess it's not necessary to sleep over it," he said. "I'm convinced that Jean wants to stay, and there's no reason why she shouldn't. I'll give in."

"So do I," supplemented Marje without even a sigh, though she looked grave. "Only I know she'll get homesick."

"No I shan't," declared Jean. "I'll bear up for Aunt Esther's sake."

As for Mrs. Fortune, she almost shed tears as she thanked Marje and Carl for their sagacity in finally comprehending that she was right about it.

"It seems that everybody is in favor of Jean staying except this young rascal," laughed Jack Gore, reaching over to give Rex a smart rap on the back. "They're all against you, Rex; Jean is going to stay with Auntie."

"I won't let her stay!" cried Rex indignantly. "She must go home. If she don't go home, I'll —"

"Dearie, listen to me," appealed Mrs. Fortune while Ned was making every effort to quiet his obstreperous charge. "I want to be fair and square about it. Won't you be satisfied, Rex, to let Jean stay with poor lonesome Auntie, just a few weeks?"

"Yes, if you'll get me that tool-chest you promised," was the child's surprising retort.

"You'll not get a tool-chest, young man," said Ned with unusual authority. "Go over to Aunt Esther now and tell her how glad you are to loan your sister to her for a few weeks. And on your way back, stop and tell Jean that you hope she'll have a jolly trip on the water and be good company for Aunt Esther. And for the rest of the day be very kind to Jean. You've never been separated from her a whole day in all your life; but you're going to be, in less than eighteen hours. Now be a nice boy instead of a grizzly bear or a red wolf or some of those other wild animals we don't like."

Whereupon Rex bounded from Ned's lap and Jean met him half way.

Thus the long discussion concerning whether Jean was to remain with her aunt, or to leave with the rest of her family, was amicably ended. The vanquished ones were entirely satisfied that the intelligent majority should rule, inasmuch as everybody had been permitted to have his own say, and no bribes had besmirched the transaction.

On the following day, nevertheless, a pall seemed hanging over the heads of the Merrymakers. It is as much of a trial to leave Chicago — after one learns to love her — as it is to try getting accustomed to her busy confusion; but, greater than the pang produced by their thought of leaving this Queen of the West, was the heart-ache they suffered in forecasting the moment when one of their band should be torn from them, in the midst of their tears and farewells. All morning long Jean felt an inclination to weep over such touching incidents as an especially tender glance from Ned; or the sight of Marje trying to act as if she did not care, notwithstanding that her eyes were still red from weeping in her small bedroom when nobody was looking. Then too, Rex was so unusually kind and

generous; not once did he make a dare that any high-bred lady would have rejected with blushes. Moreover, she kept thinking of the old home at Johnstown, with darling Bess waiting on the front piazza for the returning wanderers.

"Where's Aunt Esther?" Marje finally inquired as they sat on one of the immense station benches that reminded them of church pews. Travelers were thronging this vast apartment, many of them accompanied by red-capped porters, while the train caller in lugubrious tones kept announcing the various trains and the long list of cities at which each of them was to stop.

No one knew where Mrs. Fortune had gone, though Ned recalled that she had promised to be back in a few minutes.

"I dare say she's bringing us more things to take along," continued Marje. "I never knew such a dear. I suppose we'd be dreadfully spoiled if we weren't the kind of people that don't get spoiled. And she sent such lovely things to Bess, and bought us some new school clothes."

"We must all write to her as soon as we get home," said Carl, who was standing to guard their pile of valises and bundles.

"And you must write to me — every day," was

Jean's rather rickety appeal. She was sitting between Marje and Rex trying to bear up for the sake of the family.

"Write us funny letters, Jean," begged Carl; "and we'll do the same — probably illustrate them with our own drawings. And you must tell us all about the Lake trip and the people you meet. I'd love to visit Petoskey and Mackinac and all those Michigan resorts you're going to see. You're a lucky girl, Jean."

"Oh, I don't know —" And to their alarm the others noted that Jean's upper lip was a-tremble. What was still more to be dreaded, Rex showed unmistakable symptoms of a grief paroxysm bound to rise above all the other strident noises like a balloon surmounting the clouds. Fortunate it was that at that crucial juncture, Jack Gore came up with some time-tables and a bag of peaches.

"Hello!" he called out merrily. "Seems to me you look like a stranded show troupe — what with your long faces and all your baggage. You've got everything a human being could possibly carry except a bird-cage and a cat in a poke. Well, Neddy boy, are you glad to go back to little old New York?"

"Not especially," said Ned rather faintly. "I've

enjoyed these ten days. This Convention was more fun than the desk of the night city editor; it will be hard for me to get back to the grind again. I'm surely grateful to Cutter for sending me on this trip."

"And I'm sure he's pleased with your work," said Jack Gore confidently. "Maybe, you'll get another raise in your salary. Wasn't it jolly that we could come together? We've been pals so long, I'd have hated to be left behind."

"Everything has turned out as well as I dared to hope," went on Ned reflectively. "In the first place, I was glad Mr. Cutter showed me such courtesy — sent me out to cover this important assignment, and believed in my ability to handle it. Then I'm glad I hunted up Aunt Esther, and that she turned out to be such a prize. I'm also glad that she sent for the kiddies — and that they were all here inside of twenty-four hours. And I'm glad we're going to stop in Johnstown a few minutes, so I can see Bess."

"You're the original Glad Boy," joked Jack Gore. "You're encroaching on the territory of 'Pollyanna.'"

"But where is Gath Singleton?" side-tracked Ned.

"He didn't come to the train with us," informed Carl. "We decided that the honor of seeing us off belongs to Aunt Esther and Jean."

"Ned, have you got the tickets yet?" inquired Marje, as usual taking a motherly interest in keeping events running smoothly.

"Yes; they're safe in my vest-pocket," assured her big brother. "You'll have a whole lower berth alone, Marje, with Carl and Rex overhead, and Jack and I across the aisle. And we'll have plenty of room for the luggage. Surely Aunt Esther has supplied us with enough provisions to last us a month."

"And she actually wanted to pay Jean and me for keeping house," put in Marje. "I told her I thought we ought to pay for the privilege of handling her lovely dishes and furniture, and for everything we ate; we seemed to be eating all the time. I hope we can prove our gratitude to Auntie some day. She bought us everything we happened to mention — and many things we don't actually need —"

"Except a tool-chest," interrupted Rex, doubtlessly sorry that he had not accepted the bribe.

"And there'll be no tool-chest if I can prevent it," said Ned with such sternness Jack found it difficult

to keep from spoiling his friend's discipline by roaring at the top of his voice.

Rex was not impressed by Ned's reprimand; he was too much engrossed in watching travelers and in holding Jean's hand, though he pricked up his ears when Jack Gore suggested that they take a stroll through the big station, and, on their way back, stop for an ice-cream soda.

"We have loads of time," he added.

"One of us would have to stay to mind the baggage and wait for Aunt Esther," said Marje. "I thank you, Jack; but I believe I'd rather not go."

"And I couldn't very well leave Marje alone — she's just a young girl," explained Carl.

"And I think, being the eldest, I'd better stay behind with the rest," laughed Ned.

"I mustn't leave Jean," piped Rex, holding tighter to the hand of her, who, during the past eighteen hours, had turned out to be his favorite sister.

"And I couldn't swallow an ice-cream soda," was Jean's plaintive excuse.

"I never saw such a family to hang together," ridiculed Jack Gore. "I suppose when you get to be sixty or seventy, you'll all be sitting in a circle, or else marching along the street in a solid proces-

sion, like a brass band. Now I'm not selfish enough to break up a family, so I'll forget all about the ice-cream soda."

"You've been very kind to us during our stay in Chicago," Marje gratefully confessed, entirely forgetful of the many times Jack Gore had teased her. "You seem like one of our family."

"I haven't done half so much for you as you have for me," Jack gallantly replied. "Think of the round rebukes you've given me, and the square meals, too. In spite of the Convention, I'll never forget these jolly days spent in Chicago."

"Nor I," said Ned with fervor. "Each day seems to have afforded us an episode with a happy ending. And the Chicago people surely have treated us well; they excel all others in their hospitality as well as in their town pride."

As they continued their fragmentary conversation, Marje again was lost in reverie pertaining to Cora Parker, who that morning had sent her a jar of Chinese ginger and a note remarkable for its faulty English, yet none the less acceptable, because it fairly beamed with the thanks of a worthy girl about to avail herself of the way that had been opened to her by Marje and her aunt. Indeed it seemed almost improbable that Aunt Esther's maid-

by-the-day — who had left without giving sufficient notice, been discovered by Carl in the crowded workroom of a large department store, and hounded by Carl and herself because of their suspicion against her — had at last proven herself worthy of the best they could do for her, in order to make atonement for the annoyance they had created in her own household. She believed that Cora Parker would make a success in life, and she devoutly hoped that she would. But she forgot all about Cora Parker when once more the thought of separating from Jean sprang at her like an ugly phantom.

Then all these various meditations and odd bits of chatter were interrupted by Mrs. Fortune, totally unlike the pale and fretful lady who had met her young nieces and nephews at this same station only a few days before. To-day she wore a becoming gray dress, the plainest of her large collection. Instead of appearing depressed — as they had every reason to expect — she seemed extremely blithe and disposed to make the best of everything, perhaps for the reason that Jean was to be spared to her.

"Here's Aunt Esther," shouted Carl, while the others greeted the returning one, each in his own enthusiastic way. "We were afraid you had been kidnapped."

"No; I've just been looking after a few important matters," she explained with an indulgent smile all round. "I had to get a porter and do some telephoning. Are you all ready for the trip?"

"Yes — but we're not ready to leave you," said Marje brokenly.

Fortunately, their train was announced at that trying moment by the colored man with the loud and sepulchral voice; it was scheduled to arrive on Track Six. The boys began scrambling for the luggage; and soon, Jack Gore with a heavy grip in one hand, began supporting Marje with exaggerated care, as if she were a very incompetent but precious old mother. Marje paid no more heed to his fun-making than she did to the crowd surging all about them. As for Jean, she tried to laugh, but she felt that familiar and horrifying lump forming in her throat — a lump that seemed to flutter like a humming-bird pinned down by the broken bough of a thorn-bush. She knew if anybody said the least thing endearing, she would burst into a torrent of grief. Aunt Esther turned and gazed at her sympathetically as they approached the cruel iron gate that was to separate them from that merry party.

"You're willing to keep your promise and stay

with Aunt Esther?" she asked, her eyes mirroring apprehension.

"Ye-e-s," murmured Jean, trudging bravely along between Marje and Rex, both of whom were holding her hands so tightly that they ached.

But Mrs. Fortune was not willing to tarry behind at the gate. Superintending three or four colored porters, whom she had engaged to help them with their valises and bundles, she passed under the iron arch. Soon she was inside the coach, where she sat down on one of the plush seats in Ned's compartment and began chatting gayly, though the harrowing ordeal of parting was almost upon them.

When Marje saw that her aunt and Jean had but one minute more in which to say their good-byes, she suddenly grew panic-stricken. "Oh, Auntie, please hurry! Don't wait till the train starts; I don't want anything to happen to you or Jean."

Mrs. Fortune laughed indifferently and settled herself still more comfortably. "I thought it over last night," she explained. "And I couldn't bear to break up the happy family just yet; so I decided to strike a compromise with myself. I'm going to Johnstown instead of to Mackinac."

As yet her hearers could not believe their ears,

though Rex began whooping and the others uttered exclamations expressing both joy and surprise.

"I engaged the tickets for Jean and me this morning," proceeded Mrs. Fortune; "and I arranged last night to have them call for my trunk early to-day. It had all Jean's things in, just as she had packed them for Mackinac. You see, I played a little joke on you — and it was great fun. But I'm sorry I made poor Jean suffer. Indeed, I only wanted to see if she cared enough for me to — to stay behind. And she did — bless her! I'll reward her for showing such loyalty. But do you suppose Bessie will be put out about my swooping down upon her so unexpectedly?"

"She'll be the happiest person you ever met," said Marje above the roar of the train. It was evident, however, that Bess could be no more pleased than was the conscientious Marje herself. "You'll be such good company — and you'll have a grand time, I'm sure," she added with the enthusiasm of a lively girl glad to let her motherly responsibilities fall upon the shoulders of an older and more capable woman.

Jean, too much relieved to shed tears, joined with Marje in extending to their beloved relative a warm welcome in advance. "Bess doesn't mind company

in hot weather," she added assuringly; "that is — if they're willing to help with the work. You and I will make the beds, Aunt Esther."

Thus it happened that Mrs. Fortune, who had gotten into that calamitous state of nerves that rebels against noises and children, had locked up her elegant apartment for the rest of the summer, that she might go to Johnstown and grow into the home life of the Merrymakers, each day gleaning experiences to brighten her old age with sustaining memories.

THE END

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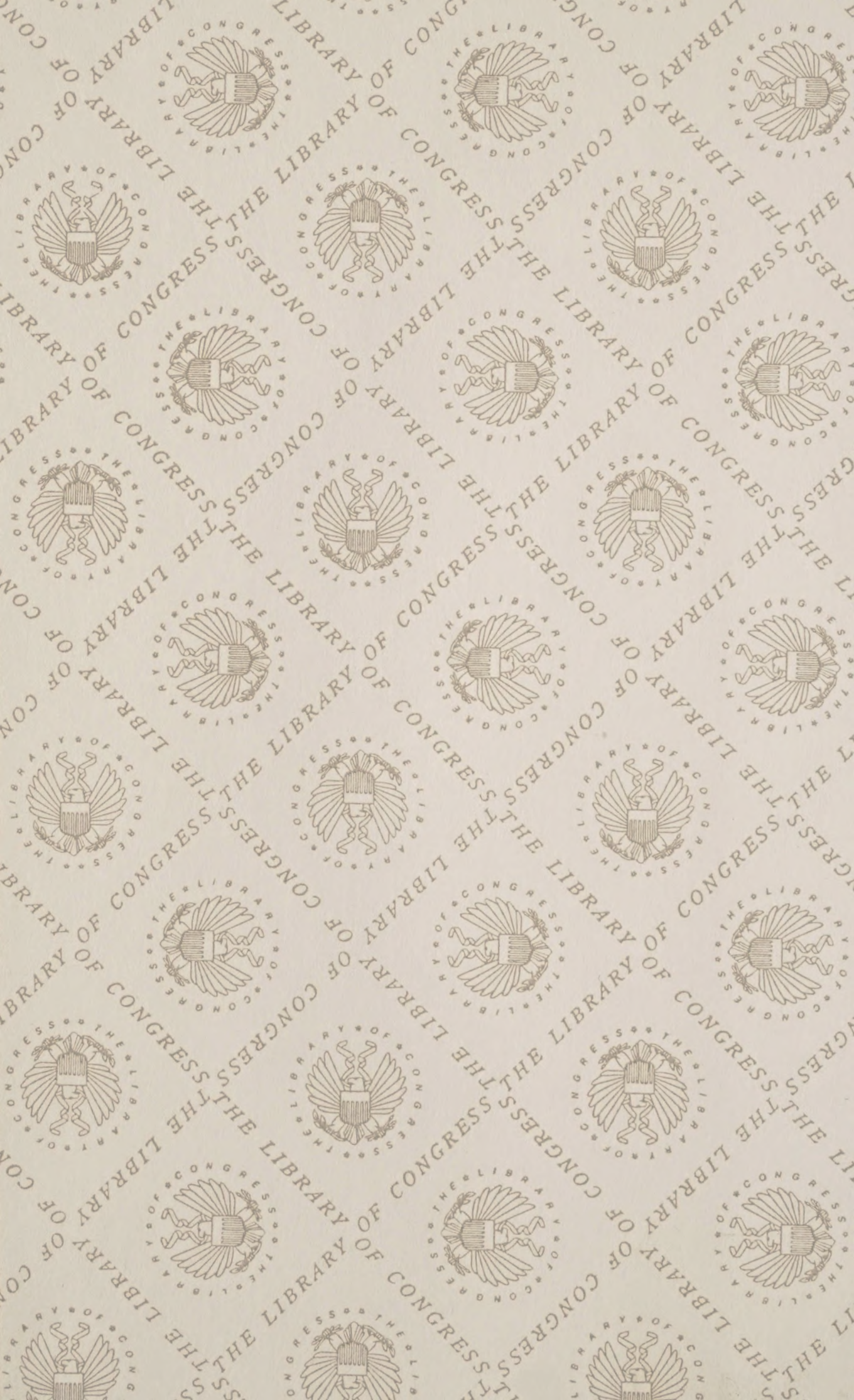
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